THE RHETORIC OF SUGGESTION IN DEBUSSY'S *MÉLODIES*:

A CONTINGENT POETICS OF THEMATICITY, TEMPORALITY, AND AGENCY

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THE RHETORIC OF SUGGESTION IN DEBUSSY'S *MÉLODIES*: A CONTINGENT POETICS OF THEMATICITY, TEMPORALITY, AND AGENCY

The fin-de-siècle rapprochement between Symbolist poets and impressionist composers constitutes a critical era in text-music relations. This study investigates Debussy's manipulation of musical materials in ways that both enact and contend with the poems' structures and semantics. The composer's investment in elusiveness—the "*introuvable*"—suggests that these songs may be implicated with issues of musico-poetic contingency and suggestion. I thus pursue a hypothetical reconstruction of Debussy's "rhetoric of suggestion," a nuanced deployment of harmony, melody, form, and musical topic that evokes a heightened sense of semantic uncertainty or a fraught experience of musical time. These strategies of musical narrative and temporality give rise to an expanded function for musical topics as they respond to and participate in contemporary aesthetic and cultural dialogues.

Stefan Jarocinski's *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (1976) provides an embryonic sketch of Debussy's use of "traditional symbols"[1]—that is, what would come to be called musical topics.[2] While Jarocinski notes that the composer's use of these signifying textures "generally bears little resemblance to traditional models,"[3] (begging the question of how Debussy *does* use his textures), he also asserts that "often as not Debussy paid no attention to symbolic suggestions when deciding in what form his works would be performed or the way in which their sound-material would be organised."[4]

[1] Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Eulenburg Books), 1976, 150.
[2] Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books), 1980.
[3] Jarocinski, *Debussy*, 150.
[4] Ibid., 151.

My analyses suggest that this presumed obliviousness (even randomness) in the use of musical topics is instead a hallmark of Debussy's coherent, albeit subversive, musico-poetic strategies—as part of a larger "rhetoric of suggestion." This rhetoric combines the nuanced deployment of musical topic along with particular harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic elements to evoke a heightened sense of musical contingency and a fraught experience of musical time. That is, our expectations for logical continuation are either denied or multiplied; expectation (future) contends with both memory and obsession (past), all within a nonlinear narrative.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Debussy's Compositional Poetics: The Rhetoric of Suggestion

The current study pursues an understanding of Debussy's compositional poetics within the genre of the *mélodie.* Analysts of this repertoire often note its participation in (or sympathy with) Symbolism in general and temporal stasis in particular. While these claims arise repeatedly, there have been fewer attempts to explain Debussy's *strategies* of musical expression, and productively nuance his musical "vagueness" or "timelessness." And there is a complementary need to interpret how these strategies advance particular musico-poetic narratives.

I propose to identify and describe Debussy's strategies of productive vagueness and indeterminacy through the lens of musical *contingency*. My analyses will reveal that a perceived randomness is a key component of Debussy's coherent, albeit subversive, musico-poetic design; indeed, it constitutes part of a larger "rhetoric of suggestion."[5] As "reconstructed" through analytical study, this rhetoric is hypothetical rather than strictly historical in its origins. However, as we shall see, Debussy's own remarks point toward its tensional and elusive aesthetic. Here we find a rhetoric that combines the nuanced deployment of multiple musical parameters in order to evoke a heightened sense of contingency and a fraught experience of temporality. Our

[5] Marshall Brown uses the same phrase to describe the poetic style of William Shenstone. He writes that Shenstone's poems "fascinate through what they conceal" and that "they employ a rhetoric of suggestion, not (or not primarily) a rhetoric of declaration or of persuasion." Marshall Brown, "The Poetry of Haydn's Songs: Sexuality, Repetition, Whimsy," in *Haydn and the Performance of Rhetoric*, ed. Tom Beghin and Sander M. Goldberg, 229–50 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 238. My usage of the term is perhaps different. In Debussy's style, the composer's "rhetoric of suggestion" is, in fact, often used for persuasive effect even though its techniques are evocative rather than straightforward. I am grateful to Robert S. Hatten for pointing me to this source.

expectations for logical continuation are either denied or multiplied; expectation (future) contends with memory and obsession (past) within a nonlinear narrative.

Musical Contingency

Contingency comes into play when there is the absence of an *a priori*, necessarily true or false statement: that which is contingent is shaped by its environment. Contingency may therefore be defined as *a possibility dependent on something uncertain*. My articulation of a theory of musical contingency addresses the ways Debussy marshals various types of musical uncertainty in order to create poetic effects. For the purpose of understanding the use of musical contingency in Debussy's songs, the ontology of this uncertainty can be further parsed, as shown in below.

Figure 1.1 Types of uncertainty

Not known	No ideas/inclinations/directions; infinite possibilities
Not certain	Hypotheses exist; ambiguity
Not present	Known, but not palpable; implicates the present
Not determined	Not fated; implicates the past
Not proven	Not proven; implicates the future

The experience of the listener is a vital component of a theory of musical contingency. According to musico-cognitive studies, listeners tend to posit an explanatory model quite early in the process of apprehending, then modify (or replace) this model to fit the events as they unfold. Eugene Narmour differentiates between "top down" and "bottom up" cognitive processing. He explains that "top down" processing relies on "schemata" and "style structures" that are "largely available to consciousness."[6] In addition, "matching an emerging implicative pattern to the

[6] Eugene Narmour, *The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity: The Implication-Realization Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

learned continuation of a previously stored schema tends to be automatic."[7] Zuzana Cenkerová and Richard Parncutt describe listeners' modifications to such schema, observing that "the results of learning studies confirm the strength and flexibility of top-down mechanisms, showing that listeners can acquire novel [. . .] rules after only brief exposure."[8] Going further, their investigation of presumed-innate melodic schemas indicates that bottom-up expectations are also subject to modification.[9]

We may thus sketch a skeletal plotline describing the construction or experience of musical contingency. As discussed, every event occurs in a pre-established context—even if this context is merely understood to be late-nineteenth-century common practice tonality. Each musical event may carry more or fewer implications for future events, depending on its structure and the frequency with which this structure is associated with a necessary outcome within a given system. Expectations for logical continuation may be denied, deferred, or multiplied by subsequent events: we may be forced to abandon an earlier hypothesis entirely, or to entertain several simultaneous hypotheses (none of which, perhaps, is fully realized). As Debussy's solo songs demonstrate, the governing musical organization may be thrown into question—that is, alternate organizations may be confirmed by subsequent elements of the composition. Retroactive reevaluation allows for the conditional tense, for the understanding of what a musical event *would have meant*, had other conditions and events been different. Leonard B. Meyer emphasizes such "awareness of what might have happened," explaining that because "we tend to be aware of the contingency of temporal events," "the fact of implication [. . .] affects our

[7] Eugene Narmour, "Hierarchical Expectation and Musical Style," in *The Psychology of Music*, 2nd edition, ed. Diana Deutsch (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999), 441.
[8] Zuzana Cenkerová and Richard Parncutt, "Style-Dependency of Melodic Expectation: Changing the Rules in Real Time," *Music Perception* 33, no. 1 (2015): 114.
[9] As they conclude, "preferences for intervals consistent with bottom-up principles [. . .] were lost after only a brief exposure to rule-violating melodies." Cenkerová and Parncutt, "Style-Dependency of Melodic Expectation," 124.

understanding of both the antecedent and the consequent event, whether the consequent was the one thought to be implied or not."[10]

Debussy's manipulation of musical contingency carries definite expressive and rhetorical significance, the most striking aspect of which is a heightened sense of semantic uncertainty. Interpretation becomes increasing fragile as musical contingency multiplies. Kofi Agawu's interrogation of the term "ambiguity" suggests a trajectory of interpretation that moves progressively from ambiguity to clarity.[11] Listening to Debussy's songs, we might ask if this is a weighted process, whereby we *become surer* toward the end of the piece, or whether we necessarily *become absolutely sure*. I argue that, in in some instances where the works' component elements conflict, we must make theoretical room for a hierarchy of meanings that is only hypothetical. At times, Debussy's strategies may even prevent the construction of such rankings.

This study suggests that a satisfying interpretation of Debussy's solo songs must often identify a "contingent state" as a kind of permeating atmosphere in this music. The contingent state demands a kind of "float"—a working hypothesis without sufficient evidence to confirm or disconfirm, one that implies *projection*, a merely possible directionality, a kind of trawling for or reaching towards. This contingent state may be of several types, of which I will explore three: the vague, the unstable, and the ambiguous. A vague contingent state describes music that is suggestive of one or more interpretations, none of which are well-defined. An unstable contingent state applies to music that oscillates between conflicting interpretations. And an

[10] Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 112, 111.
[11] Kofi V. Agawu, "Ambiguity in Tonal Music: A Preliminary Study," in *Theory, Analysis, and Meaning in Music*, ed. Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 90.

ambiguous contingent state permits more than one interpretation simultaneously. Rather than moving towards clarity, many of Debussy's solo songs evade conclusive interpretation.

This tenuous commitment to teleological fulfillment has consequences for temporal experience. The ontology of preceding material may be called into question by subsequent events. Our projections and expectations for the future may be either refuted or ignored, and the significance of first things is thus overturned. Contingent states thus tend to counter end-directed, teleological narratives, creating instead nonlinear or static experiences.[12] Timelessness is evoked when the listener is unable to successfully anticipate, or retrospectively rationalize, changes in the course of the music. Vagueness undermines teleological development, making both the present and the future less certain.

As we have seen, musical contingency theory interacts with the implication/realization theory developed by Meyer and Narmour. But Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion changes a listener's relationship to top-down schemata. The top-down aspect of implication-realization theory models a *type* of contingency—one in which the realizations typically belong to a *single* system or style. For example: in the tonal system, a Mm^7 sonority implies a dominant-seventh function that leads us to expect tonic, but may—instead—be realized as a German augmented-sixth chord in another key. Either "realization" belongs to a single system: functional tonality. However, as Narmour argues, stylistic context is fundamentally problematic, since "structural representations of style in the mind of the listener constantly undergo change."[13] This is perhaps particularly true of Debussy's music. The composer's construction of musically contingent states

[12] In her discussion of Debussy's *L'isle joyeux*, Emma Adlard argues that "Debussy's music, like Watteau's art, inhabits an open-ended and ambiguous temporal mode of simultaneity" in which "it is [. . .] futile to prioritize the directionless over the dynamic." Emma Adlard, "Interior Time: Debussy, *Fêtes galantes*, and the Salon of Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux," *The Musical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (1 August 2013): 201. Such comparisons can be further nuanced. In the present work we will explore how Debussy's implementations and contradictions of traditional musical teleologies create contradictory temporal strands that evoke not only nostalgia but also surrealism.

[13] Narmour, *Analysis and Cognition*, 8.

requires that the listener allow for several other, potentially non-functional interpretations. In a Debussy song, a particular Mm^7 sonority may, for instance, belong to a pair of oscillating harmonies whose roots are a tritone apart. Or, the arrival of the nominal tonic, while strongly signaled, may be indefinitely forestalled. Or, the cadence (and therefore, the nominal stability) effected by this chord may later be interpreted as ironic or misleading. Schooled by Debussy's style, the schemata suggested by the top-down aspect of implication/realization models are multiplied, increasing the number of expected possible conclusions. And, while Debussy often satisfies tonal expectation, he just as often does not. For the listener, top-down expectation is thus permeated with a kind of stylistic mistrust.

As I have argued, contingency theory also differs from strict ambiguity as explicated by Agawu,[14] in that contingency theory places emphasis on the *projection* and *multiplication* of possible organizing systems. When interpreting Debussy's solo songs, we must take exception to Agawu's normative understanding of ambiguity. Whereas Agawu writes of tonal music only, in which closure is clarifying, closure may not be as "convincing" in Debussy's music and tonality may not be the only system at play. Whereas Agawu insists that there always exists a hierarchy of plausibility or contextual clarity, for Debussy such hierarchies may be neither obvious nor desirable. In certain works, Debussy may "clarify" ambiguity in multiple ways—that is, different musical elements may respectively confirm more than one of the possible implications. Finally, it may be prudent to ask if Debussy's strange incursions or *non sequiturs* are perhaps intended to trigger corresponding states of confusion or uncertainty as their primary expressive effect.

In response to the purposefully elusive quality of Debussy's idiom, this study undertakes a hermeneutic investigation of three interrelated strands: thematicity (including motives, themes, and topical allusions); temporality (including small-scale motivic and large-scale formal

[14] Agawu, "Ambiguity in Tonal Music."

processes, historical references by means of musical topics and intertextuality, and the evocation of memory); and agency (including "intentional"[15] energies that resist or counteract environmental forces, and the construction of "virtual agencies"[16] that give embodiment to, and interpretation of, willful entities beyond the obvious agency of the poem's speaker). Already synthetic—that is, comprised of multiple musical parameters—these entangled strands should not be studied in isolation: rather, Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion typically depends on their close interrelationship.

Text-Music Relationships

Text-music studies have been particularly interested in investigating assumptions regarding the relationship of poetry and music, with several scholars exploring models of critical perspective in song analysis. The relative independence of each element remains a particular concern. (Does music merely support a poem's meaning? Does the setting determine how the poem will be understood?) William Dougherty's comments are illustrative: "It is precisely *a* view . . . of the relationship between music and poetry . . . that directs analytic inquiry insofar as that view reflects the degree to which the genre preserves its expressive autonomy and its

[15] John Peterson notes that when a musical element or passage contradicts the musical system (i.e., tonality), a musical agent may be said to be exerting "intentionality." "Intentional Actions: A Theory of Musical Agency" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2014), 252.

[16] Because some of Debussy's songs seem to switch musical systems, or to use musical systems intermittently, it may be that framing agential "contradiction of musical forces" only as movement against a backdrop system (Peterson, "Intentional Actions," 252) is inadequate to Debussy's compositional language. And yet, the figure/ground dichotomy that has characterized some theories of agency seems to engender the depiction of a humanlike actor or personality *in conflict with* an inhuman, mechanical environment. But in Debussy's songs, rather, the agent might be understood to contradict the inertia/momentum of an entire musical system (e.g, tonality) and replace it with another. Or, in other cases, the kaleidoscopic change of background systems or collections might be construed as another kind of agency, acting upon a musical theme. Robert S. Hatten's theorization of "virtual agency" encompasses such possibilities. He defines "virtualizing" as *a process in which* "ascriptions of agency [are moved] into the music itself, when musical energies are understood as actions by an unspecified *virtual actant*." *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming). In turn, the various actants may be interpreted individually as willful human agents that play actorial roles in the music's narrative. Finally, these roles are woven together as "parts of a larger subjectivity."

interpretive fluidity."[17] Despite this early realization of the import of flexible analytical models, Suzanne Lodato's assessment of the state of Lieder studies suggests that, of Kofi Agawu's four models of song analysis,[18] the majority of analysts use the "pyramidal" approach, in which the music underscores the text's meaning.[19] Nevertheless, Lodato maintains that it is Agawu's tri-partite model (which allows for the "overlap" of "three independent entities—text, music, and song") that seems the most promising.[20] Similarly, Lawrence Kramer insists that

> Rather than reading *song* as a form in which the poem is engulfed by the music, or choosing to interpret [it] along simple mimetic lines, it is by looking at the level of their shared structural rhythms that we can have greater insight into the particular nature of this contact between music and poetry.[21]

In addition, scholars have theorized the kinds of relationships that may arise between music and poetry (aside from the question of dominance described above). Nicholas Cook posits three possibilities: conformance (in which the two elements are consistent), complementation (in which "different media are seen as occupying the same terrain, but conflict is avoided through the existence of . . . mutual gaps"), and contest, the most "productive" of meaning (in which opposing media compete, "each attempting to impose its own characteristics upon the other").[22]

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[17] William P. Dougherty, "The Play of Interpretants: A Peircean Approach to Beethoven's Lieder," in *The Peirce Seminar Papers: An Annual of Semiotic Analysis*, vol. 1, ed. Michael Shapiro, 66–95 (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1993), 66. Dougherty goes on to note that "the lied consists of an inherently uneasy and potentially unstable symbiosis of music and text whose nature, in that it gives rise to multiple layers of signification, compels an analyst to seek its semiotic import on a more complex expressive plane than that afforded by a search for one-to-one correspondences between text and music or between music and text" (ibid., 73).

[18] Kofi Agawu, "Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century *Lied*," *Music Analysis* 11, no. 1 (1992): 3–36. The four models are: assimilation, incorporation, pyramidal, and tri-partite. Labels for the latter three models (incorporation, pyramidal, and tri-partite) were formulated by Suzanne M. Lodato, "Recent Approaches to Text/Music Analysis in the Lied: A Musicological Perspective," in *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Word and Music Studies at Graz, 1997*, ed. Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf, 95–112 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 95.

[19] Lodato, "Recent Approaches to Text/Music Analysis," 95.

[20] Ibid., 95, 108.

[21] Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 10.

[22] Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 98–104. Lawrence M. Zbikowski proposes another such model, this one foregrounding the strictures of musical perception, in his *Conceptualizing Music: Cognitive Structure, Theory, and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

As we shall see, the texts and music of these songs embody strong intra-opus tensions of their own and interact in ways to produce emergent meanings beyond the purview of either isolated medium. The purpose of this study is thus to develop a stylistic understanding of Debussy's approach to the *mélodie*, while shifting the analytical stance from an assumed congruence between text and music to a model that permits both similarity and productive difference. As Debussy himself suggested, the artwork constitutes a kind of imaginary country that is, as a result, inscrutable—"un pays chimérique et par consequent introuvable."[23] As analysts of these works, we are thereby encouraged to pursue the metaphorical "vanishing point" of an impossible juxtaposition of text and music. Thus the multimedial context of a song (embracing both words and music) both enriches and complicates interpretation. By bringing two media into proximity, song enables a fluid play of relational stances between poetry and music.

Poetic Texts and Compositional Strategies

While Debussy's songs have attracted scholarly attention both musical and literary, not all analyses give weight to both musical and poetic genres as equal participants in the song, when conceived as a mixed-media genre. Those that do often focus on the composer's settings of a single poet (thus highlighting the particular affinities between that poet and the composer, and/or foregrounding the poems' literary qualities as "translated" into the musical settings),[24] or on comparisons of poems set by more than one composer (thereby foregrounding the poem's ability

[23] Claude Debussy quoted in Peter Dayan, "Nature, Music, and Meaning in Debussy's Writings," *19th-Century Music* 28, no. 3 (2005): 218.

[24] Examples of scholarly approaches to Debussy's settings of a single poet include Sander Becker's study of Debussy and Baudelaire ("Debussy et son goût de la poésie: La représentation musicale des figures de style de Baudelaire," *Relief* 6 [2012]: 136–61. http://www.revue-relief.org/index.php/relief), Barbara Meister's study of Debussy and Verlaine ("The Interaction of Music and Poetry: A Study of the Poems of Paul Verlaine as Set to Music by Claude Debussy, and of the Song Cycle Songs and Proverbs of William Blake by Benjamin Britten" [PhD diss., City University of New York, 1987]), and Geoffrey Allan Wilson's study of Debussy and Mallarmé ("Music and Poetry in Mallarmé and Debussy" [PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2007]).

to support multiple interpretations or highlighting the difference between compositional styles).[25] Arthur Wenk's 1976 monograph[26] provides analytical commentary on many of Debussy's songs—including their poems. However, his selection of songs does not include any with texts by François Villon or Charles d'Orléans (for instance), and thus omits Debussy's significant interest in early French poetry. More importantly, Wenk's chronological approach (roughly by date of composition) does not focus on trends or developments in the composer's treatment of similar poetic themes and structures.

How do Debussy's compositional strategies interact with the expressive threads of his song texts? The current study aims to develop a more thoroughgoing understanding of the interaction of Debussy's settings with the texts he chose, focusing on the ramifications of his compositional strategies for the dynamic relationship between music and text that gives rise to that "third" entity—the song itself. The songs I have chosen represent a cross-section of Debussy's compositional oeuvre: the texts are by many different poets and the settings are chosen from throughout Debussy's song-writing career (roughly from 1897 to 1915). I explore four significant poetic themes that illuminate the suggestive and contingent rhetoric of Debussy's settings.

The first theme may be summarized as *repetition and change*. This idea posits a friction between elements of persistence and processes of development (both poetic and musical). Which achieves ascendency, stasis or change? What contextual factors determine the meaning of repetition? What is the effect of repetition on the construction of temporal experience—for example, what differentiates artistic evocations of ennui and those of ecstasy? "Rondeau," "Le

[25] Examples include Fumei Huang's comparative study of Debussy's and Ravel's Verlaine settings ("A Comparative Study of Paul Verlaine's Poetry in Musical Settings" [DMA diss., Boston University, 2004]) and Theo Hirsbrunner's comparative study of Debussy's and Ravel's Mallarmé settings ("Zu Debussys und Ravels Mallarmé-Vertonungen," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 35, no. 2 [1978]: 81–103).
[26] Arthur B. Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

jet d'eau," "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," and "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" serve as representative works.

The second theme is that of *confinement and escape*. Among poetic and musical strategies of closure and non-closure, or continuity and discontinuity, which is ascendant? These songs often map confinement and escape onto the play between reality and dream. In this repertoire, rhetorical breaks can signal the shift between expressive modes, indicating the infiltration of fantasy or doubt. "De fleurs" and "Placet futile" are my principal examples.

The third theme directly addresses the opposition between *real and surreal*. Here the analysis observes the construction of false realities and temporal confusion. Of particular interest are the tensions Debussy creates between musical functions and musical genres, tensions that give rise to instances of the musical surreal. The repertoire here includes "Spleen," "Recueillement," and "Je tremble en voyant ton visage."

Finally, I turn to *the elusive past*. Analytical and poetic interpretations of "L'ombre des arbres," "De rêve," and "Les ingénus" reveal the importance of memory, of conflated temporalities, and of resonance. As these works unfurl imagistic webs, I will explain how such meanings are connected or sequenced.

Tracing these poetic themes in Debussy's solo songs reveals the expressive strategies that constitute the composer's rhetoric of suggestion. As we will see, specific musical strategies do accrue to each of the four poetic themes. We will also find recurring musical strategies that cut across the boundaries of these poetic strands and point toward expressive concerns inherent in the composer's aesthetic. In constructing deliberately treacherous text/music relationships, Debussy often deploys conflicting musical structures and plays with contradictory harmonic systems and signs. His manipulations of thematic, temporal, and agential cues give rise to new

topics and unexpected nuancing of established expressive modes. Together, these rhetorical strands contribute to a distancing aesthetic in which apparently non-urgent reactions betray deeply urgent emotions, and surface ennui can signal unresolvable complexity.

Chapter 2. Thematicity, Temporality, and Agency as Analytical Arenas: "En sourdine" (1882) and "En sourdine" (1892)

In order to highlight Debussy's poetic themes, I begin each analysis with an investigation of the poem, including its sounds and structures. My musical analysis then proceeds according to the following three questions: How do musical themes and topics function within the songs? How does Debussy evoke or manipulate aspects of musical temporality? What agential qualities emerge from the settings? These three arenas of strategic action—thematicity, temporality, and agency—typically arise from the interaction of multiple musical parameters. Very often, the three arenas are also themselves interconnected; Debussy's thematicity often supports his construction of temporality, and his construction of temporality may undergird the construction of agency.

After conducting this tripartite musical analysis, I then address how the music interacts with the poem to create the song. Because of the difference in media, Debussy's musical statement necessarily differs from the poem's statement, even when many of the musical aspects appear to "reflect" the text. Debussy often deliberately works in opposition to certain aspects of the poem, creating a significant misreading, distortion, or contradiction of the poem.

Expressive Genre and Harmonic Language

The interpretive frames of expressive genre and harmonic language provide cues toward the understanding of thematicity, termporality, and agency. As Robert S. Hatten explains, an expressive genre "can serve as an interpretive frame for a movement or cycle of movements, prescribing an overall outcome (or perspective on that outcome) regardless of intervening

events."[27] As we shall see, in many cases, the composer's rhetoric of suggestion relies on the distortion or expansion of musical elements' traditional roles. This is true even of interpretive frames: while expressive genre and tonality typically provide hermeneutic context, Debussy also treats them as malleable entities, subject to his subversive poetics.

Although Debussy began writing his solo songs from the vantage point of the traditional nineteenth-century *mélodie,* his harmonic and formal approaches quickly moved beyond traditional models. As such, he often opposes teleological forces with unanchored or static passages. Indeed, while Debussy's songs typically reference tonal archetypes, it is often difficult to determine precisely where the tonal world (with its gravitational orientation) forms the ground of the piece, against which atonal elements mark aberrations, on the one hand, and where the composer simply evokes tonality for topical reasons, as if referencing a museum piece. The tension or balance between these interpretations is intentional. As we will see, the friction between tonality and more modern harmonic languages is expressively motivated, furthering the rhetoric of suggestion already found in the poems.

Poised at multiple intersections—between poetry and music, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between tonal and post-tonal approaches, between voice and piano—an interpretation of Debussy's songs requires a fluid methodology. Contextual meaning is of critical importance, and I explore techniques that are deployed somewhat differently each time. The rhetoric of suggestion thus creates a distinctive web of semantic relationships in each work.

[27] Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 83.

Thematicity

Stefan Jarocinski's *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism* (1976) provides an embryonic sketch of Debussy's use of "traditional symbols"[28]—that is, what would come to be called musical topics.[29] While Jarocinski notes that the composer's use of these signifying textures "generally bears little resemblance to traditional models,"[30] (begging the question of how Debussy *does* use them), he also asserts that "often as not Debussy paid no attention to symbolic suggestions when deciding in what form his works would be performed or the way in which their sound-material would be organised."[31] But topical reference clearly plays a significant role in many of Debussy's solo songs, entering into dialogue with the poem's imagery.

Examples of Debussy's topical references include allusion to dramatic performance (e.g., to operatic recitative), evocations of the inaccessible pastoral, or intimations of the exotic (e.g., Spanish flamenco or medieval modality). In other cases, motivic devices may acquire thematic associations from their juxtaposition with poetic images, and take on (proto)topical significance. In this category are Debussy's nature topics (e.g., water and wind) and the notion of "melody" as topic (in contrast to the composer's more *parlando* vocal writing).

Particularly important for Debussy's thematicity are those motives in the piano part that open the work or section and recur throughout the song. Since his use of such components blends their structural and semantic aspects, I will refer to these as "characteristic motives." Their

[28] Stefan Jarocinski, *Debussy: Impressionism and Symbolism*, trans. Rollo Myers (London: Eulenburg Books, 1976), 150.
[29] As theorized by Leonard G. Ratner, musical topics arise when a composer references previously established musical genres or styles, typically through pastiche rather than direct quotation. These musical references, in turn, carry with them the extramusical associations born of their original cultural uses and contexts. As such, musical topics can serve as tools for interpreting musical meaning. Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980).
[30] Jarocinski, *Debussy*, 150.
[31] Ibid., 151.

identities range from the obviously topical (that is, music that clearly references extra-musical contexts) to the accompanimental (pervasive, text-painting figuration in the manner of a Schubert *Lied*), to the enigmatic (music that begs explanation, its significance perhaps clarified later in the work, or music that will—in connection with the text—give rise to new topics).

While some songs largely honor the teleological implications of the tonal contract, others move toward floating signifiers of tonality. In such cases, the composer re-imagines traditional tonal procedures and forms as topical markers. Without discussing Debussy, Thomas Johnson argues that in modernist music (e.g., in Schoenberg's early atonal works), "tonality itself often functions as a powerful topic."[32] In explicating the specific "*figura*" of the C-major triad, Johnson explains that its "full code [. . .] centers on ideas of pastness and simplicity."[33] Similar meanings arise in Debussy's use of topical tonality, as we shall see. However, in these songs, it is more often a harmonic progression (and not a single triad) that functions topically. Such passages result in tonal harmonic motions (or sonorities) that are deployed symbolically as well as syntactically: tonality serves as a repository of topical effects (e.g., "cadences") rather than as a closed system.

I have said these motives often perform structuring functions. They may highlight formal articulation by framing the piece—appearing in both piano introduction and postlude—or by signaling the beginning of new sections. When characteristic motives recur *within* larger formal sections, this persistence or density of musical imagery and motivic networking can function in various ways. The ubiquity of a characteristic motive might contribute to coherence and continuity. In contrast, the mobility of such motives may also contribute to the sense of randomness or misdirection, and perhaps suggest the nonlinear functioning of memory. As we

[32] Thomas Johnson, "Tonality as Topic: Opening A World of Analysis for Early Twentieth-Century Modernist Music," *Music Theory Online* 23, no. 4 (December 2017): 1.4.
[33] Johnson, "Tonality as Topic," 6.5.

will see, Debussy's approach to the characteristic motive also supports his constructions of temporality and agency.

Temporality

Debussy's songs engage temporality in several ways. In some songs, different musical motives are associated with different poetic temporalities (e.g., past and present, or real and imagined). The composer uses topics not only to create musical contrasts but also, on occasion, to directly reference historical styles pertinent to the poem's discourse. In other instances, motivic development may suggest the temporal processes of dissolution or refinement.

The composer's various approaches to tonality are complicit in his works' temporal complexity. Passages of tonal transparency or clear tonal rhetoric often contrast with areas of less directed materials (or materials that are patently symmetrical or directionally obscure). Then, just when triadic structures seem stripped of any teleological implications, harmonies that first appeared to be non-functional dominants are, at least on the surface, "resolved" later in the piece. Such instances suggest tonality as a potential agent of teleology, while also implying that tonality's essential wiring is decaying, and that its power over larger spans is intermittent.

In their overall forms, Debussy's *mélodies* typically respond to their text's poetic structures, but need not recreate them. A play of pattern between poem and music is common, which in turn gives rise to a tensional structure for the song. In terms of his formal strategies of musical contingency, Debussy often creates unresolved uncertainty in his equivocal use of traditional structures. The approach often suggests an unanchored, improvisatory stance, in which allusion to common-practice formal models does not, in the end, establish a sense of familiarity but rather alienation. Traditional form is, in the final analysis, part of Debussy's

"introuvable." Because his songs often evoke multiple formal contracts, the works' embodiments of temporal processes become multifaceted and conflicted.

The suggestion of strophic form, which is one of Debussy's typical opening gambits, frames the experience of time as a cycle of repetition. On the other hand, through-composed elements within the same works simultaneously suggest a forward-directed temporal progress. To these formal processes, Debussy often adds the use of arch form or thematic bookending, thereby evoking another kind of static, non-directional, or retrogressive temporality. Such strategies suggest a musical journey in which a subject recalls earlier time in memory, thereby constructing an interior time that is at times parallel to—and at other times at odds with—the unfolding of surface events. Similarly, Debussy's techniques of intercutting, interpolation, and intertextual reference suggest the shuttling, time-travel aspect of memory and recall. Such passages imply a layering of temporalities or temporal perspectives.

Musical Agency

Anthony Newcomb's foundational article on musical agency describes three types of musical agents: institutional, natural, and sentient.[34] My focus in these analyses will be on agents of the latter category, which are most easily understood as possessing will and autonomy. As such, I concur with Hatten's formulation of agency, wherein "the counteraction of musical forces can provide a strong trace of a willful agency—allowing for a sense of agential 'free will' while moving within the constraints of a virtual environment's field of forces." [35] Similarly, John Peterson has recently summarized the study of musical agency as the process of "identifying"

[34] Anthony Newcomb, "Action and Agency in Mahler's Ninth Symphony, Second Movement," in *Music and Meaning*, ed. Jenefer Robinson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 136.
[35] Robert S. Hatten, "Musical Forces and Agential Energies: An Expansion of Steve Larson's Model," *Music Theory Online* 18, no. 3 (Sept 2012): par. 20.

musical notes or passages "that metaphorically invoke a sense of intentionality."[36] His six categories of intentionality highlight resistance: "gesture, contradiction of musical forces, unexpected event, change of state, repetition/restatement, and conflict."[37]

Because their poetic texts are typically written in a single speaker's voice, Debussy's solo *mélodies* easily lend themselves to the evocation of a single agency. On the other hand, these speakers often direct their words to another ("you") or describe the activities of various other actors, thereby opening space for the song to construct musical agencies for individuals who do not speak through the poem.

To be sure, the songs' orchestrations—that is, the use of both voice and piano—afford the composer a simple means of differentiating musical agencies. Debussy often presents the voice and piano in a dynamically changing textural chiaroscuro. For example, in addition to homophony, the composer makes particular use of "planing" or "parallelism," in which multiple parts follow the melodic line in parallel motion. Parallelism amplifies the melodic line, giving it particular force and attention. It also collapses the separation between instruments, evoking agential agreement, union, or singularity. Debussy also makes use of textural dissociation, in which the piano plays against the voice to create pictorial, leitmotivic, or atmospheric effects. Dissociation creates a dramatic space in which motivic interactions between voice and piano evoke the multiple agencies implicated in the subconscious, often emphasizing their ironic contradiction. Because the voice carries the text, it lends itself to agential constructions of consciousness, whereas its nominally textless partner, the piano, more readily lends itself to constructions of *sub*conscious musical agency. We will also see instances of agential influence, in which one part adopts thematic material first presented by the other.

[36] John Peterson, "Intentional Actions," 44.
[37] Ibid., 48.

Debussy's Two Settings of Verlaine's "En sourdine"

In both settings of "En sourdine," Debussy uses triple meter and ends the songs in the major mode implied by their respective key signatures.[38] The songs' opening motives even share several specific features: ambiguous harmonic oscillations, syncopation, borrowed triplet subdivision, and an emphasis on G♯. Nevertheless, the two settings of "En sourdine" are separated by ten years and despite significant similarities, the songs evidence quite different expressive approaches.

The composer's first setting of "En sourdine" (1882) reveals strategies to which the he will return in later works. Within the pastoral expressive genre, the composer tropes Romantic unrest and revelation with pastoral undercutting, thereby expressing both a frustrated impulse and a sublime, rarefied intimacy. The music not only makes topical reference to nature but also to various musical genres. In addition, rather than necessarily operating within tonality as a closed system, Debussy often uses traditional tonal progressions more for their topical, poetic effect. His characteristic motives work in multiple ways. Besides alluding to topics, they may stagnate as ostinato repetitions or prefigure the formation of full-fledged themes. Upon returning in subsequent sections, these motives often accrue agential significance, overlaying later text with a memory of their first poetic associations. As such, Debussy's approach to form is complex and often ambiguous. His musical structure simultaneously establishes deep connections to the poetic text and challenges the poet's form.

The pastoral topic of the 1892 setting is nuanced by variation techniques that Debussy uses to evoke natural rhythms, depict disorientation or misperception, and evoke memory. Rather than misaligning the musical and poetic focal points (as had the 1882 setting), the 1892 setting presents several different kinds of musical focal points, thus precluding clear analytical

[38] The four-sharp setting of 1882 ends with an E-major triad; the five-sharp setting of 1892 ends with B major^{add6}.

prioritization. As the setting unfolds, deliberate formal uncertainties contribute to a dissipation of clear rhetorical focus. At the same time, the progression of agential developments suggests a kind of teleology. Which quatrain receives greatest musical emphasis? That is, what matters most: human passivity? Nature's persuasion? Future results? The composer's rhetoric holds in abeyance any clear resolution of these questions.

Paul Verlaine's "En sourdine"

Paul Verlaine published "En sourdine" as the penultimate poem in his 1869 *Fêtes galantes.* Referencing eighteenth-century aristocratic masquerade excursions as depicted by artists like Watteau, Verlaine evokes a refined pastoral mode.[39] Yet, as A. E. Carter notes, "En Sourdine" provides little in the way of "rococo detail"; instead, "reality is transposed into crepuscular suggestion."[40] Thus, the poem exploits the "alternative reality" afforded by the *fête galante* world.[41] In "En sourdine," Verlaine's manipulation of the pastoral mode's traditional literary components—nature, the lovers, the entreaty—creates a modernist narrative, ambiguous and unsettling.

[39] "The phrase 'Fête galante' is not readily translated. 'Courtly outing' as preferred in the body of the translation conveys the sense of an 18th-century excursion by the upper classes in gardens or gentle woods. Both Verlaine and Debussy referred to the Rococo court painter Watteau, who specialized in such scenes but imbued them with mystery and even foreboding." James R. Briscoe, ed., *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, *Medium Voice* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1993), 11.
[40] A. E. Carter, *Paul Verlaine* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971), 35.
[41] Susan Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine:* Fêtes galantes *and* Romances sans paroles (London: Grand & Cultler, 1988), 66.

Figure 2.1. Paul Verlaine, "En sourdine," Fêtes galantes, *1869*[42]

	En sourdine		Muted[43]
1	Calmes dans le demi-jour	*a*	Calm within the half-light
2	Que les branches hautes font,	*b*	That the high branches make,
3	Pénétrons bien notre amour	*a*	Let us imbue our love
4	De ce silence profond.	*b*	With this profound silence.
5	Fondons nos âmes, nos cœurs	*c*	Let us melt together our souls, our hearts
6	Et nos sens extasiés,	*d*	And our ecstatic senses,
7	Parmi les vagues langueurs	*c*	Amid the vague languors
8	Des pins et des arbousiers.	*d*	Of the pines and arbutus.
9	Ferme tes yeux à demi,	*e*	Close your eyes halfway,
10	Croise tes bras sur ton sein,	*f*	Cross your arms over your breast,
11	Et de ton coeur endormi	*e*	And from your sleeping heart
12	Chasse à jamais tout dessein.	*f*	Chase forever all intention.
13	Laissons-nous persuader	*g*	Let us be persuaded
14	Au souffle berceur et doux,	*h*	By the gentle, lulling breath
15	Qui vient à tes pieds rider	*g*	That comes to ripple at your feet
16	Les ondes de gazon roux.	*h*	The waves of russet lawn.
17	Et quand, solennel, le soir	*i*	And when, solemnly, the evening
18	Des chênes noirs tombera,	*j*	From the black oaks will fall,
19	Voix de notre désespoir,	*i*	Voice of our despair,
20	Le rossignol chantera.	*j*	The nightingale will sing.

"En sourdine" presents a conflicted structure: while some features embody the goal-oriented teleology of the romantic entreaty, others inscribe stasis. Contributing to the forward motion of the entreaty, the uneven and "fluid" rhythms of the poem's heptasyllabic lines are particularly well suited to "intimate evocation."[44] Taylor-Horrex notes that because poetic lines comprised of odd (rather than even) numbers of syllables are not typical in classical French

[42] In his 1882 setting Debussy makes two changes to the poem: he omits the adjective in line 18 ("Des chênes ~~noirs~~ tombera") and he repeats the poem's final couplet. Margaret G. Cobb, *The Poetic Debussy: A Collection of His Song Texts and Selected Letters*, trans. Richard Miller (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 43nn2, 3.
[43] Translation after James R. Briscoe, ed., *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, *High Voice* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1993), 13–14. Unless otherwise credited, all translations of song poems are adapted from James Briscoe's edition. And, unless otherwise credited, all translations from secondary research sources are my own.
[44] Michel Barlow, Joël Dubosclard, and Bénédicte Reveyrand, Fêtes galantes *et autres recueils:* Poèmes saturniens, Romances sans paroles, Sagesse, Jadis et Naguère, Profil bac (Paris: Hatier, 2000), 109.

verse, such *vers impair* can also "convey a vague sense of the disturbing."[45] The poem's passage of time is forward-directed (from "afternoon" in line 1 to "evening" in line 17),[46] with its final quatrain apparently describing contingent events in the future tense. The rhyme-scheme is "through-composed" in the sense that each quatrain uses a new set of end rhymes; the lack of direct sound repetition supports a semantic trajectory of change.

But the poem's five quatrains simultaneously articulate a quasi-arch-form structure that bespeaks stasis. The first and final quatrains open with a description of the environment, the second and fourth quatrains speak with somewhat indirect invitations ("let us"), and the middle quatrain addresses the beloved in more direct imperatives. Thus, as the poem unfolds, it moves from description toward increasingly personal engagement before retreating back into description. Thierry Chaucheyras describes an arch form comprising the quatrains' spatial references: "verticality—horizontality—circularity—horizontality—verticality."[47]

These contradictory structural backdrops support Verlaine's unexpected poetic narrative: the pastoral seduction of "En sourdine" replaces pursuit with an invitation to intentional and mutual passivity, implying that deeper fulfillment may be found in sublimation. Rather than romantic immediacy, the poem's imagery emphasizes the partial and the indeterminate: "muted" (title), the "half-light" (line 1), "vague" (line 7), half-closed eyes (line 9). Even the poem's narrator has a blurred identity. As Chaucheyras notes, "the poem doesn't even risk giving the first-person singular the chance to emerge. The speaker/non-speaker opposition [. . .] is

[45] Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine*, 67.
[46] Thierry Chaucheyras, "Chant, motif, désir: La persuasion lyrique chez Verlaine," in *Verlaine à la loupe: Colloque de Cerisy, 11–18 juillet, 1996*, ed. Jean-Michel Gouvard and Steve Murphy (Paris: Champion, 2000), 28.
[47] "verticalité – horizontalité – circularité – horizontalité – verticalité." Chaucheyras, "Chant, motif, désir," 28n23. While Chaucheyras does not explain these spatial references in detail, there is obvious "verticality" in the views of the trees in quatrains 1 and 5, "horizontality" in the recumbent lovers in quatrain 4 that may also be inferred in quatrain 2, and a kind of "circularity" in the folded arms in quatrain 3.

attenuated, as if hidden." [48] Rendering boundaries indistinct, the poem's dimming of sound and sight, together with its suppression of the first-person singular, enacts the proposed union as a melding together of "souls," "hearts," and "ecstatic senses" (lines 5–6).

Over the course of the poem, the speaker also argues for imitation of and connection to the natural world. The couple should imbue their love with the "profound silence" of the trees (quatrain 1). The lovers' melding is staged amid the "languors" of the evergreens (quatrain 2). As the poem unfolds, it describes a reciprocal relationship between the human figures and the landscape, in which "nature seems to exhibit the very purposefulness which the lovers have abdicated."[49] In quatrain 3, the most rhythmically patterned of the poem, the speaker's hypnotic speech urges total human passivity.[50] Thus entranced, the pair may be persuaded by the breeze (quatrain 4). Here, ordinary human enticement is replaced with Nature's vaguer—but therefore more encompassing—rhetoric. In quatrain 5, as Nicolas Wanlin notes, the externalization of expression marks "the final stage in the dissolution of the whole being into its environment." [51] No energy is lost in this metaphysics: the emotion sublimated by the human pair finds voice in the natural world.

The final quatrain may be interpreted as both inevitable and surprising. With regard to motif, Chaucheyras argues that the first quatrain prefigures the last, as indicated by the following associations: "branches"/"oaks," "half-light"/"evening," "calm"/"solemn," "love"/"despair," and

[48] "le poème ne se risqué pas jusqu'à donner à la première personne du singulier l'occasion d'émerger. L'opposition locuteur/non-locuteur [. . .] est atténuée, comme dissimulée." Chaucheyras, "Chant, motif, désir," 25.
[49] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 37.
[50] All four lines of quatrain 3 divide into the same syllabic groupings, 4•3. Alan English writes that "it is in fact extremely difficult to control or regulate the placement of the internal rhythmic accent, especially taking into account the normally frequent occurrence of enjambment in lines as short as the heptasyllable." (Il est en fait extrêmement difficile de controller ou de régler la place de l'accent rythmique interne, eu égard surtout à l'occurrence normalement fréquente de l'enjambement dans un vers aussi court que l'heptasyllabe.) Alan English, *Verlaine, poète de l'indécidable: Étude de la versification verlainienne* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 139.
[51] "C'est l'ultime étape d'une dissolution de tout l'être dans son environnement." Nicolas Wanlin, "Le dispositif du paysage dans *Poèmes saturniens* et *Fêtes galantes*," in *Lectures de Verlaine:* Poèmes saturniens, Fêtes galantes, Romances sans paroles, ed. Steve Murphy (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 140.

"silence"/"will sing."[52] Taylor-Horrex argues that the poem's sound design serves as a presentiment of disaster. While classical French poetry typically alternates between masculine and feminine rhymes,[53] "En sourdine" does not. Thus, the poem's exclusive use of masculine rhyme, "with its characteristic of closed finality, paradoxically conveys the poet's purposeful and determined progress into a world free from the constraints of the intellect. The rigidity of the rhyme hints too at certain failure [. . .]."[54] In addition, the descriptions of quatrains 1 and 3 may be construed as foreboding, particularly in retrospect. Barlow, et al. describes Verlaine's "profound silence" (line 4) as "ambiguous: the expression reminds us of the absolute calm of nature, but also of the disquieting silence associated with death."[55] The imagery of quatrain 3 is similarly double-edged: the speaker urges the beloved to assume a sleep-like, even tomb-like pose (line 10).

Despite these intimations, the poem's conclusion is surprising both lexically and narratively. Anne Holmes explains that Verlaine occasionally makes strategic use of "words that belong to the staple vocabulary of Romantic verse and which had by his time become stale through overuse." Yet, in the poet's "carefully attenuated climate of half-tones," these words create a contrast that "gives them back their force." She cites the appearance of "despair" in "En sourdine" as "the most surprising instance of the technique."[56] For a romantic entreaty to conclude in despair is not surprising per se: invitation always risks refusal. What draws attention

[52] "passage de 'branches' à 'chênes,' de 'demi-jour' à 'soirs,' de 'calmes' à 'solennel,' de 'amour' à 'desespoir,' enfin de 'silence' à 'chantera.'" Chaucheyras, "Chant, motif, désir," 26.
[53] As David Hunter explains, in a line with masculine rhyme, "the main stress falls on the final syllable" (even if the word is feminine); in a line with feminine rhyme, "the syllable bearing the main stress is followed by a mute e." *Understanding French Verse: A Guide for Singers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 60. The alternation of masculine with feminine rhymes became a hallmark of French verse toward the close of the sixteenth century (ibid., 62). Note that the mute e does not count toward the line's number of syllables although it is often sounded as an additional syllable when sung or even when recited.
[54] Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine*, 66.
[55] "ce 'silence profound' est ambigu: l'expression fait songer au calme absolu de la nature, mais aussi au silence inquiétant associé à la mort." Barlow, Dubosclard, and Reveyrand, Fêtes galantes *et autres recueils*, 109–10.
[56] Anne Holmes, "Verlaine's Creation of 'Suspens' in *Romances sans paroles*," *The Modern Language Review* 104, no. 2 (April 2009): 394.

is that this outcome does not appear to result from the entreaty's failure, but from—or regardless of—its success. That is, *because of* (or *despite*) the lovers' ecstatic connection to one another, their carefully designed passivity, and their fusion with nature, the nightingale will sing of their despair.

The poem's conclusion thus evokes an uneasy mix of interpretive possibilities. Following the model of the classical pastoral entreaty, the poem's conclusion should offer a promise of reward or triumph. In this interpretation, an otherwise inescapable despair is displaced from the human heart—via dissolution into the natural world—and externalized as an impersonal object of beauty. Alternatively, the emotional twist simultaneously implies that the poem's outcome narrates disaster. As Taylor-Horrex argues, the poem offers "a glimpsed perfection [. . .] counterpointed by a failure which poignantly underlines that perfection."[57] Hallam Walker similarly observes that the poem "is characterized by very strong images of merging, but it is now into darkness and death that all dissolves."[58] If so, what is the reason for this apparently predestined, but nevertheless unforeseen, failure? Perhaps the speaker's formula is wrong, and it is precisely the silencing of love or the embrace of passivity that will eventually trigger the collapse of hope. Or, maybe the fault lies with the ambiguous, unfixed emotion of ecstasy which cannot prevent the final quatrain's tragic turn. Indeed, "En sourdine" withholds causal explanation just where it is most wanted. Thus, at its modernist conclusion, the poem's careful ambiguities of plot and structure articulate both teleology and stasis, success and failure.

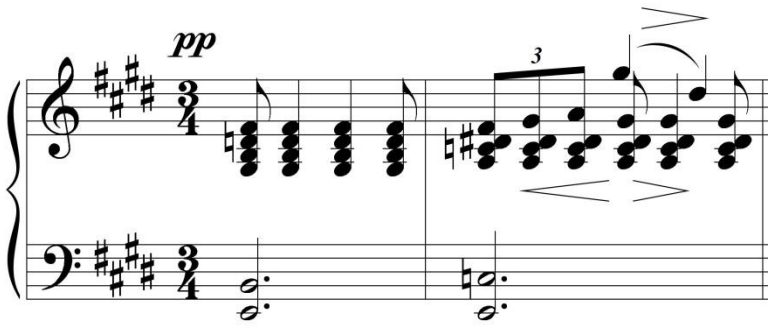
Debussy's 1882 Setting of Verlaine's "En sourdine"

As is often true of Debussy's songs, the 1882 setting of "En sourdine" opens with a short piano introduction that presents the work's first characteristic motive (figure 2.2; this is labelled

[57] Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine*, 78.
[58] Hallam Walker, "Visual and Spatial Imagery in Verlaine's *Fêtes galantes*," *PMLA* 87, no. 5 (October 1972): 1014.

"W" on the form diagram in figure 2.4). This two-bar motive evokes a Romantic style with its lush sonorities and persistent, slow-tempo syncopation. Against this backdrop, a surging triplet ascends, answered by a falling fourth in quarter notes in the upper register. Yet Debussy indicates "une sonorité très voilée" (a very veiled sound), a direction that, combined with the pianissimo dynamic level, tempers the triplet motive's urgency, effectively "undercutting" the expressively Romantic idea.[59]

Figure 2.2 "En sourdine" (1882), mm. 1–2: W[60]



The motive's harmonic progress is also frustrated. Rather than resolving the opening E^9 as a functional dominant, Debussy initiates an oscillation between E^9 and $d\sharp^{o7(add4)}$ over an E pedal—a disguised tonic-dominant vamp that repeats as an ostinato in mm. 3 and 5.[61] Thus the first characteristic motive creates a trope that both evokes and restrains expressive agitation.[62] Indeed, Verlaine's title—"En sourdine"—requires just such a synthetic musical idea. For "Muted" does not indicate quiet, per se, but the suppression or mitigation of energy. An

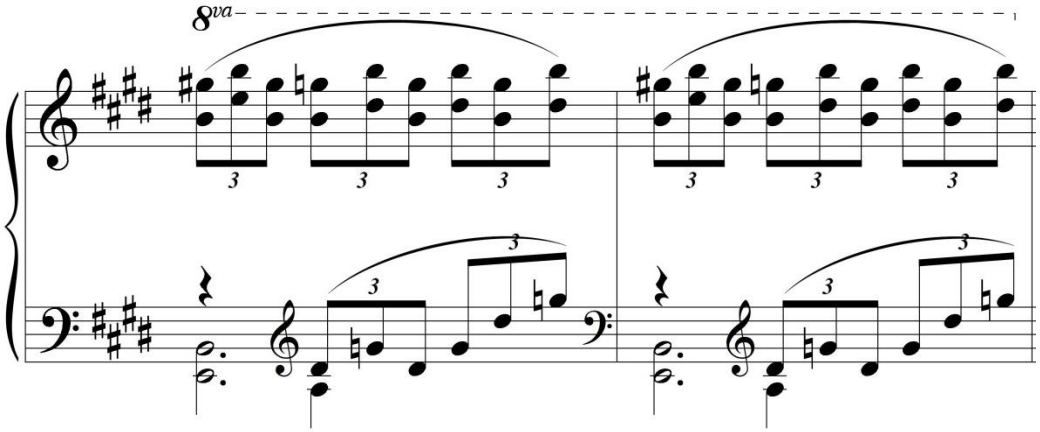
[59] Robert S. Hatten includes "undercutting of expressive climaxes" as an example of one of the "fundamental principle[s] of pastoral expression in music: mollified tension and intensity." *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 56.
[60] Score excerpts for Debussy's 1882 setting of En sourdine" are based on the manuscript facsimile found in *Collection de fac-similés de manuscrits de Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, *Chansons, recueil de mélodies dédiées à Marie-Blanche Vasnier* (Paris: Centre de documentation Claude Debussy, 2011).
[61] Retaining the tonic pedal on E, the "dominant-function" sonorities parse far less obviously than the opening chord: m. 2 sounds first $d\sharp^{o7}$, then—perhaps—$G\sharp^{\flat 9}$. In fact, the passage may not sound convincingly functional.
[62] Hatten explains that a musical trope must fulfill three requirements: First, it must synthesize "contradictory, or previously unrelated types." Second, these elements "must arise from a single functional location or process." Third, "there must be evidence from a higher level [. . .] to support a tropological interpretation." *Musical Meaning*, 170.

instrumental mute does not simply create a softer dynamic, but a new color. Here, Debussy's trope bespeaks latent potency or nostalgia, stimulating Romantic yearning while thwarting its expected expressive trajectory.

Natural Topics

With the setting of the second quatrain, the piano inaugurates a new, oscillatory texture that participates in Debussy's topical evocation of Nature (mm. 11–12; see figure 2.3; X on the form diagram in figure 2.4). Debussy typically uses oscillating figures in association with water. For example, oscillations pervade the accompaniment pattern of "Il pleure dans mon coeur" ("It rains in my heart"; 1887/1903). Such figures are used prominently in "Le jet d'eau" (1889); see for example the piano accompaniment for the first description of the fountain (mm. 12–17). In "Recueillement" (1889), such figures accompany the phrase "[See] smiling Regret arise from the depths of the waters" (m. 49).[63] The composer's 1903 setting of "Clair de lune" uses an oscillating triplet figure for the final line of Verlaine's text, "The tall water jets, slender amidst the marble statuary" (m. 27).[64]

Figure 2.3 "En sourdine" (1882), mm. 11–12 of the piano part: X[65]



[63] "Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant." Briscoe, *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, 148.
[64] "Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres." Briscoe, *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 63.
[65] Score excerpt based on the manuscript facsimile found in Debussy, *Collection de fac-similés*, vol. 2.

Figure 2.4. Music and poetry in "En sourdine" (1882)

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
motive	W		W		W		(syncopation recalls W)			
harmony	E (pedal)						$C♯^{9}$		$F♯^{13}$	B
form	**Section A**									
line	*piano intro*		*1*		*2*		*3*		*4*	
rhyme			*a*		*b*		*a*		*b*	
quatrain			Quatrain 1							

11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
X	X	Y (voice & piano)					
E (ped)		c♯ (pedal)				$C♯^{9}$ F♯	B
Section B							
5		*6*		*7*		*8*	
c		*d*		*c*		*d*	
Quatrain 2							

19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Y (voice & piano)				Y (voice & piano)			
f♯–d♯^{ø7}			$D♯^{7}$	G	F♯ d♯^{ø7}	e^{7} a^{7}	B
Section C (but note variation of Y from m. 13)							
9		*10*		*11*		*12*	
e		*f*		*e*		*f*	
Quatrain 3							

27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
Z									Z	
B^{9}			$e^{6/4}$–G^{6} (oscillat.)				F♯	B^{7}	F♯	B^{7}
Section D										
13		*14*		*15*		*16*		*piano interlude*		
g		*h*		*g*		*h*				
Quatrain 4										

38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
X	X	X	X′	Y (voice & piano)				Y (voice & piano)			W		W			
E (pedal)				A–d♯^{ø7}		f♯–d♯^{ø7}		G^{+}	F♯	B^{9}	E (pedal)					
Section B′				**Section C′**							**Section A′**					
17		*18*		*19*		*20*		*(19)*		*(20)*	*piano postlude*					
i		*j*		*i*		*j*		*(i)*		*(j)*						
Quatrain 5								(Quatrain 5)								

Notes:

W: 2-bar motive, syncopation, triplet, P4 sigh in upper register

X: oscillation in triplets

Y: melodic theme

Z: oscillation in eighths

Each poetic line is set to roughly two measures of music, although the length of anacrusis varies.

In quatrain 2 of "En sourdine," the topical reference is metaphorical, accompanying the melting merger of souls and senses ("fondons," line 5). Oscillations are also associated with the gentle breeze described in quatrain 4 (see Z on the form diagram; mm. 26–34).[66] While the element of water is not literally present, the wave-like grass makes a similar allusion to water.

Topical Harmony

After beginning with a plateau on E (mm. 1–6 and mm. 11–14), both quatrains close with an archetypal circle-of-fifths pattern in B: C♯ (or c♯)–F♯–B (mm. 7–10, mm. 17–18).[67] As we have seen, the setting's logic of harmonic continuation is not always as convincingly functional (e.g., mm. 1–6). Debussy's topical use of tonal strategy thus seems to invoke tonality as a repository of effects rather than an inescapable force field within which tension and release are played out.[68] In this context, the descending-fifths sequence is used as much for its topical force as its harmonic logic; closure is as much poetic as tonal. At the close of the first quatrain, the cadence underscores the "profound silence" of Verlaine's text (line 4, mm. 8–10): traditional and emphatic, the cadence implies that nothing more need be said. And yet, when the same cadence is echoed at the end of the second quatrain for "vague languors / Of the pines and arbutus" (lines 7–8, mm. 15–18), the musical directedness and closure is at odds with the poetry's imagistic indeterminacy. The musical gesture becomes in one sense trivial, since it sets varying poetic

[66] Debussy also uses an oscilation in the piano for quatrain 4 in his 1892 setting of "En sourdine" (mm. 26–34). In both songs, oscillations continue into the settings of quatrain 5.

[67] In both cases, the extended-tertian harmonies on C♯ and F♯ imbue the progression with a suggested forward direction, while the B-major harmony is a simple triad more traditionally appropriate to closure. It is worth noting that in m. 11, the circle of fifths continues onto E, whereas the similar progression at the end of quatrain 2 does not.

[68] Of course, such a conception of tonality is ahistorical. It is also, for the turn of the twentieth century, associated with Germanic thought rather than French practice (although it was Rameau who first crystallized a system describing normative harmonic root motion). As we will see in subsequent chapters, the harmonic plan of quatrains 1 and 2 prefigure similar use of the descending-fifths sequence as an element of closure in "Le jet d'eau" (first in quatrain 1 and again in quatrain 6 continuing through the final refrain). The first quatrain's motion from E to B also looks ahead to the progressive tonality of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," where each stanza rehearses the move from F♯ to C♯.

texts. At the same time, the predictability of the cadential cliché enhances a larger persuasive strategy, imbuing the setting with a lulling calmness.

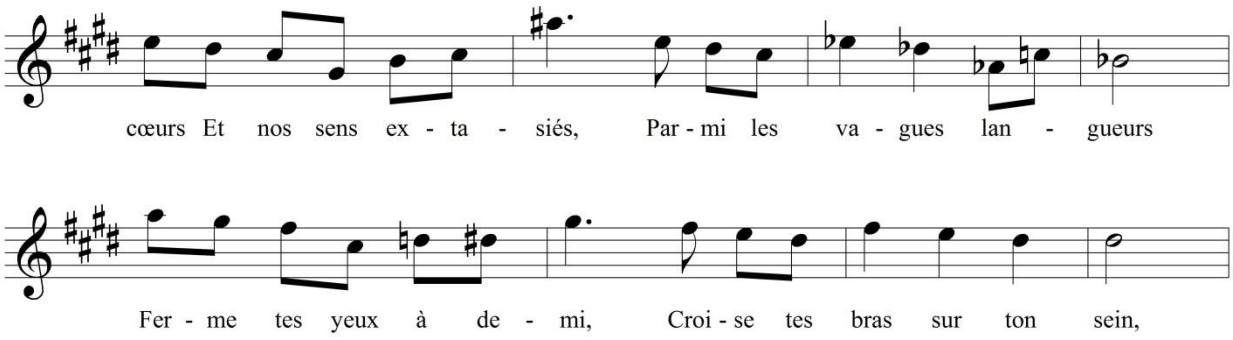
Thematicity and Agency

The song's third characteristic motive (Y) is an example of Debussy's foreshadowing and agential use of thematic material. Y first appears at the climactic passage of quatrain 2 (see mm. 13–16). In fact, the forte A♯ on the downbeat of m. 14 is notable as the song's vocal and dynamic apex, text-painting the word "extasiés" and compressing its syllable count.[69] Here the melody cuts across poetic divisions (both lines and couplets), setting the end of line 5, line 6, and line 7. Thus prefigured, the entire shape of the vocal melody in mm. 13–16, along with the parallel doubling in the piano (especially in m. 14) is crystallized thematically in quatrain 3. The formalization of this motive into four-bar phrases that now set integral poetic couplets and recur to constitute eight-bar periods (mm. 19–22, sequenced and varied in mm. 23–26) evokes the repetitive and predictable phrasing characteristic of popular song. Because the popular song style contrasts with the setting's previously through-composed vocal line, the motive is simultaneously rendered stable and marked for difference. Yet Y also carries the poetic imprint of its origins, imbuing quatrain 3 with a "speaking melody"[70] that recalls ecstatic union in a style that is both persuasive and memorable.

[69] "Extasiés" should parse into four syllables when sung: ex-ta-si-és." But Debussy sets it with only three notes, thereby dividing the word into only three parts: "ex-ta-siés" (mm. 13–14). The melodic compression of this word enacts the "melting together" described in line 5 of the poem. (Notably, Debussy compresses the same word in his 1892 setting of "En sourdine" [mm. 13–14].) This is not the only example of Debussy's contravention of syllabic expectations in his 1882 setting. In line 3, "notre amour" should parse into only three syllables: "no-tr'a-mour." But Debussy sets it with four notes, thereby adding a syllable: "no-tre-a-mour" (mm. 7–8). This addition fills out the triplet subdivision on beat 3 that contributes to the melody's rhythmic vitality and echoes the triplet on beat 1 (m. 7). It also emphasizes the word "notre," since this word is sung as if separated from "amour."

[70] Lawrence Kramer theorizes "speaking melody" as the instrumental repetition of an originally texted vocal line. Although the instrument does not literally reiterate the words, they are nevertheless recalled to mind. "Speaking Melody, Melodic Speech" in *Word and Music Studies 7*, ed. Suzanne M. Lodato and David Francis Urrows (New York: Rodopi, 2005), 127.

Figure 2.5 "En sourdine" (1882), mm. 13–16 and 19–22 of the vocal part: development of Y[71]



Both the popular-song style and the texture of quatrain 3 are complicit with the directness of the stanza's poetic address. The piano doubles the vocal line throughout most of the quatrain, thereby giving its melody greater emphasis. In addition, the collapse of previously differentiated roles between piano and voice implies the union of separate agencies, enacting the poem's ecstatic melding. The first phrase in quatrain 3 cadences on D♯^{7} (m. 22), and the dominant seventh suggests we might expect g♯ (iii) on the downbeat of m. 23. Instead, when Y repeats, it begins, pianissimo, on G (♮III). The deceptive motion—via chromatic mediant—lends a mystical quality to the last half of the quatrain. Thus, just where the poem's speaker changes from physical to psychological influence, Debussy effects a particularly charged motion into distant musical space, as if bringing the unified musical agencies into an unforeseen and heightened intimacy.

Form: Temporality and Agency

The similarities between the harmonic plans of quatrains 1 and 2 could suggest strophic form, but quatrains 3–5 do not follow the same harmonic plan. And, although quatrains 1–2 have similar harmonic outlines, their thematic materials are contrasting. As the song progresses, rather than continuing the implied strophic-variation form, Debussy's succession of motivic materials

[71] Score excerpt based on the manuscript facsimile found in Debussy, *Collection de fac-similés*, vol. 2.

articulates an arch-form design: W–XY–Z–XY–W.[72] Like the structure of Verlaine's poem, Debussy's quasi-symmetrical form serves to mute a strong teleological trajectory; by retracing its steps, the song ends where it began. On the one hand, the piano postlude's nearly exact reprise of W may be understood as expressing stasis more emphatically than does the poem, which does not restate its beginning so clearly. On the other hand, the first and only time that the song uses B–E as a *cadential* gesture (mm. 48–49), together with the song's ending on a simple, E-major triad (mm. 53–54), could imply that a change has taken place, that nature's "profound silence" has finally suffused the human world. Thus, the musical ending may be interpreted as an affirmation of stasis or of transformation. In this sense, the musical form achieves a double effect similar to the poem's ambiguous balance between surprise and inevitability.

In addition to the uncertainty afforded by the musical ending, Debussy further complicates interpretation by misaligning the music's structural arch.[73] Although the musical and poetic forms begin in synch, their arch forms diverge after m. 26, where Debussy adds an "extra" musical section (Z) to the compositional fabric. Because the composer's arch is offset from the poem's, the thematic "center" of the musical arch (Z) sets quatrain 4, not quatrain 3. Whereas Verlaine's poem places human actions at the spatial center of its arch form (quatrain 3), Debussy's music gives this central position to the agency of nature (quatrain 4).

Despite the similarity of poetic and musical forms, is the musical arch intended only as an element of musical design, without concern for specific poetic connections?[74] Perhaps. When the repetition of X first suggests a musical connection between line 5 ("Let us melt together our

[72] For clarity's sake, this summary does not depict adjacent repetitions of motivic materials. See figure 2.4, which details such repetitions. Benedikt Leßmann's analysis reveals a similar arch form: **A** (mm. 1–10) **B** (mm. 11–26) **C** (mm. 27–37) **B′** (mm. 38–49) **A′** (mm. 50–54). "Debussy und Verlaine: Konturen der Liedkomposition bei Debussy am Beispiel der zwei Vertonungen von *En sourdine*," *Musiktheorie* 28, no. 1 (2013): 68.

[73] In "Le jet d'eau," Debussy also responds to the poem's arch structure with arch-form music that does not exactly follow the text's indicated boundaries.

[74] Leßmann argues that the form of this setting is "more musically than textually determined" (Mehr musikalisch als textlich determiniert). "Debussy und Verlaine," 68.

souls") and lines 17–18 ("And when, solemnly, the evening / From the oaks will fall"), the narrative connection between the two ideas is not immediately obvious. But as the musical arch continues with Y, it enables several possible narrative interpretations. The repetitions of Y make a musical connection between lines 9–12 ("Close your eyes halfway, / Cross your arms over your breast, / And from your sleeping heart / Chase forever all intention") and lines 19–20 ("Voice of our despair, / The nightingale will sing"). In a sense, the link implies causality: because the musical repetition is predetermined by the arch form, earlier choices have specific consequences. In this interpretation, the musical reprise implies that it is the lovers' union and abdication of intention that brings about the events of the final stanza, whether the result is understood negatively (as the trigger for despair) or positively (as the achievement of a deep connection with nature). Here again, Debussy's subtle variation is expressive: the simpler (albeit surprising) G-major harmony that secured the melody's return in m. 23 has become a more fraught and ambiguous G^{+} (m. 46).

The return of Y also forges a topical link, since Y is associated with popular song style, and the poem's final lines explicitly refer to the voice and to singing. Here again, the motive's popular melodic genre provides a contrast to the song's default vocal mode. The musically united voice of quatrain 3 has seemingly become the voice of the nightingale, albeit one shaped not by topics referring to Nature, but by a clearly "human" style. At the same time, Y still carries the imprint of its first poetic association in mm. 13–14. Thus, in Debussy's setting, the poem's final lines are backlit with the memory of an ecstatic union.

The return of Y also suggests a kind of nostalgia, or perhaps a sense of the endurance of human art. Why does Debussy repeat lines 19–20? Wenk explains that "since this melody [that is, motive Y] originally sets four lines of text, the last two lines of the poem must be repeated in

order to make the song come out right."[75] And yet, although the musical arch form also repeats characteristic motives W and X, it does not reiterate their sections in full. Instead, the reprises of sections A and B (each of which *also* set four lines) are truncated. Therefore, rather than being strictly necessary, Debussy's repetition of the final poetic couplet may well serve to establish, or even exemplify, Y's memorability.

As we have seen, Debussy's blended structure (strophic variations and arch form) first alludes to motion in place, then to the stasis of symmetrical return.[76] Then, although the music's arch-form boundaries start in alignment with the poem's, Debussy eventually disturbs this correlation. Besides shifting "central" focus to Nature's agency, the musical arch forces an uneasy paradigmatic equivalence between poetic quatrain 3 and the poem's final couplet. (In contrast, the poem links quatrain 1 with quatrain 5.) The setting leaves open the possibility that the musical return of XY could also be understood as highlighting an ironic poetic contrast: despite the speaker's invitations, the future holds despair. But the music also points to a causality not clearly afforded by the poem, as Debussy uses the lyrical and "ecstatic" motive (Y) to link human passivity to an ultimate expression of union with nature. The precarious musico-poetic connections are further ambiguated by Debussy's evocation and undercutting of expected Romantic expressivity, a technique that rejects the older idiom in favor of a more sublimely elusive and intimate discourse.

[75] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 41.

[76] As Roy Howat has shown, some of Debussy's works reflect mathematical proportions (e.g., the Golden Section), thus creating alternate formal and affective structures. *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Debussy's 1882 "En sourdine" appears less indebted to such structuring, although the song's mathematical Golden Section occurs at 33.375 (of 54 measures), about where the piano transitions into the setting of the final quatrain. As we shall see, "Rondeau" (chapter 3) shows a more thoroughgoing adherence to such patterning.

Debussy's 1892 Setting of Verlaine's "En sourdine"

The 1892 setting presents an immediate topical contrast to the earlier setting. Whereas the first characteristic motive of the 1882 version is distinguished by surging romanticism rendered intimate through pastoral undercutting, the 1892 setting opens with a quasi-improvisatory melody (X on the form diagram below). The background syncopation that permeated the 1882 motive also appears in the melody of the 1892 setting, but instead of a throbbing intensity, the effect is that of nonchalance. The ascending triplet of the 1882 version has become a less energetic neighbor-note embellishment. While scholars of the 1892 "En sourdine" have typically interpreted its first characteristic motive as emblematic of the poem's nightingale,[77] Raymond Monelle also argues that Debussy associated the motive's "leisurely *gruppetto*" with music itself.[78]

In "En sourdine," this "musical" figure is embedded within a pastoral topic. The melody begins on G♯, part of a half-diminished seventh on E♯ that functions as vii^{ø7}/V, resolving to an "arrival six-four"[79] on B in m. 2. At that point, G♯ is interpretable as a pastoral added sixth to the song's B-major pitch center. The melody outlines the black-key pentatonic scale, a pastoral

[77] For example: Alfred J. Wright, "Verlaine and Debussy: *Fêtes galantes*," *The French Review* 40, no. 5 (April 1967): 629; Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 41; Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 228; Avo Somer, "Chromatic Third-Relations and Tonal Structure in the Songs of Debussy," *Music Theory Spectrum* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1995): 224; Christian Goubault, *Claude Debussy: La musique à vif* (Clamecy: Minerve, 2002), 64; and Leßmann, "Debussy und Verlaine," 68.

[78] Raymond Monelle, "A Semantic Approach to Debussy's Songs," *Music Review* 51, no. 3 (August 1990): 202. Besides the 1892 setting of "En sourdine," Monelle cites two additional examples: the figure "perhaps imitates Spanish *cante jondo* in the piano prelude *La Puerta del Vino*, and in *Harmonie du soir* it seems to illustrate the music of the violin" (202). The *gruppetto* in "Harmonie du Soir" (1887–89) is most similar to the figure in "En sourdine," since both triplets outline melodic neighbor motions. Regarding the topical interpretation, it is worth noting that in both works the musical idea initiates the song but is not poetically associated with the violin or the nightingale until later in the piece. The connection to the 1912–13 "La puerta del vino" is less obvious, since its ornamental figures show a wide variety of forms, including gapped melodic patterns in quick sextuplets (e.g., mm. 13–14) as well as triplet neighbor motion (e.g., mm. 25–26).

[79] The "arrival six-four" is theorized by Hatten in *Musical Meaning*, 15. As he explains, "the cueing of closural stability by the cadential six-four is such that one may exploit it without ever completing the cadence." Additional aspects of the major-mode arrival six-four may include its opposition to previous (minor) sonorities in the manner of a Picardy third and "an expressive connotation of transcendent resolution" (ibid.).

collection Debussy increasingly highlights.[80] First sounded in the high register, the languid melody extends its embellished descent over four measures.[81] Together, the characteristic motive's features topically evoke an ancient and exotic music appropriate to Pan, an iconic figure of pastoral music and seduction.[82] At the same time, the harmonic plan of these measures recalls Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* in compressed abridgement.[83] The song's $e\sharp^{\text{ø}7}$ (m. 1) respells the "Tristan" chord from the beginning of the prelude (Debussy's E♯–B–D♯–G♯ substitutes for Wagner's F–B–D♯–G♯) and the song's B^{add6} (m. 2) alludes obliquely to the end of the opera, where B major (albeit in root position and without the added sixth) marks Isolde's death ("wie verklärt" [as if transfigured]). As such, this intertextual reference tempers the pastoral topic, infusing the song with memories of the opera's yearning and transcendent tragedy.

[80] Variations of X in mm 8–10, 32–34, and 39–43 are entirely pentatonic. As we shall see, "Spleen" opens with a similarly Arcadian black-key melody. Annegret Fauser describes the exoticism of "En sourdine" as deriving from Indonesian influence. As she explains, Debussy begins "En sourdine" with a black-key pentatonic melody "before ending in a whole-tone alternation B–C♯, which recalls both melodic contour and rhythm of the *suling*, the Javanese flute [. . .]. Save for the additional whole-tone step D♯–E♯ in measures 5 and 9, the voice remains for the entire first stanza within the pentatonic *suling* contour outlined an octave higher in measures 1–2." *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 201.

[81] The 1892 motive is thus twice as long as the motive that begins the 1882 setting.

[82] The melody's initial gapped-pentatonic descent also bears resemblance to the gapped pentatonic descent that opens "Placet futile." In its gestural profile—an emphasized initial high note, followed by scalar descent—the melody of "En sourdine" also resembles the chromatic-hexachordal descent that opens the *Prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune."*

[83] I am grateful to Marianne Kielian-Gilbert for this intertextual reference.

Figure 2.6. Music and poetry in "En sourdine" (1892)

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
motive	X				X		X		~~X~~	~~X~~
harmony	→B?							d♯^{7}		
form	**Section A**									
line	*piano intro*			*1*		*2*	*3*		*4*	
rhyme				*a*		*b*	*a*		*b*	
quatrain				Quatrain 1						

11	12	13	14	15	16	17
X, transposed to E (first half extended)						
→E				g♯^{7} voice on black-key pentatonic		
Section A, cont.						
5		*6*		*7*	*8*	
c		*d*		*c*	*d*	
Quatrain 2						

18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z	
Ambiguous oscillation; shows similarity to mm. 1–7				E^{13}		D	
Section B							
9		*10*		*11 – 12*			
e		*f*		*e – f*			
Quatrain 3							

26	27	28	29	30	31
Z (continuous)					
Mm7 in parallel with vocal melody					A♯^{9}
Section C					
13		*14*	*15 – 16*		
g		*h*	*g – h*		
Quatrain 4					

32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43
X (Z)		~~X~~		Quotation from 1882 X					~~X~~		
Harmonies ambiguous Debussy introduces F♯ dominant (→B? b?)				B^{9}–E^{add6}		Shows similarity to progression in mm. 33–34; F♯ B^{add6}					
Section A′											
	17		*18*	*19*		*20*		*piano postlude*			
	i		*j*	*i*		*j*					
	Quatrain 5										

Notes:

X: two-part motive: syncopated repeated notes, then embellished descent

~~X~~: only the second half of the motive is sounded (the embellished descent)

Y: triplet motion, repeating G♯–E(♯)–D on beats 2 and 3

Z: eighth-note oscillations

Variation Techniques: Nature, Disorientation, and Memory

In the 1892 setting, repetitions of X are somewhat unpredictable rather than block-like, thus enhancing the setting's improvisatory or "natural" quality. The motive's quasi-intermittent repetitions are perhaps not so much un-patterned as they are multiply patterned. Indeed, Debussy varies both halves of X (the syncopated repeating tone and the embellished descent), with quatrain 1 featuring variation of the second half of the motive and quatrain 2 featuring variation of the first half. Focusing on the embellished descent, Sylveline Bourion observes that in quatrain 1, repetitions of the motive are proportionally shortened.[84] Yet, as she admits, this process is not mechanically realized: the elision of m. 7 introduces an element of "irregularity" into the otherwise regular pattern of motivic repetition and proportional shortening.[85] This recursive treatment thus reveals (m. 10) the "essential" idea that was "almost invisible" within the motive's first appearance (mm. 1–4).[86] But Debussy is not finished with the motive. At the beginning of quatrain 2, the music emphatically retrieves its earlier profile: the return of X is marked by a *tripled* repetition of its original opening-note syncopation (mm. 11, 12, and 13). Signalling distortion and disorientation, Debussy uses a similar kind of divided and "refracted" variation in his setting of "L'ombre des arbres" (1885).

Debussy also varies X by transposing it and giving it new harmonic accompaniments. This is a technique that the composer will use repeatedly in the programmatic contexts of dream and memory. Mark DeVoto calls the *Prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune"* (1894) "the greatest of all memory pieces," and notes that "the Faun's continual effort to remember his dream yields

[84] Sylveline Bourion, *Le style de Claude Debussy: Duplication, repetition et dualité dans les strategies de composition* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2011), 163.
[85] Bourion, *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 163. In her description, the elision of m. 7 counts twice: the motive's second presentation is three bars long (mm. 5–7) and its third presentation is two bars long (mm. 7–8). Recursive regularity is thus evidenced in motivic lengths of 4 bars, 3 bars, 2 bars, 1 bar, 1 bar. However, the elision makes another analysis equally defensible: motivic lengths of 4 bars, 2 bars, 2 bars, 1 bar, 1 bar.
[86] Ibid., 164.

only the C♯ flute melody harmonized in five different ways, at three different transpositions, in a dozen different melodic variants."[87] We will see a similar treatment in Debussy's song "De rêve" (1895), which describes the memories of nostalgia as a kind of dreaming. As such, Debussy gives X another kind of distance, placing it in the "half-light" (line 1) of daydream or memory.

Evolving Form

In its broad strokes, the 1892 setting may be understood as idiosyncratically and asymmetrically ternary in form. That is, characteristic motive X begins and ends the work, and interior quatrains 3 and 4 present contrasting material. Underscoring this motivic design, quatrains 1, 2, and 5 feature D♯ whereas quatrains 3 and 4 feature D♮. As such, Debussy uses D♯ to characterize poetic quatrains describing human emotion and D♮ for those describing human passivity. The first quatrain begins and ends with D♯ in the voice, and the vocal melody reiterates D♯ as a reciting tone (mm. 4–5, m. 7). In quatrain 2, the vocal highpoint on "extasiés" (m. 14) is also a D♯, this time sounding as the chordal seventh. Like quatrain 1, quatrain 5 begins with a D♯ reciting tone (m. 33). In contrast, quatrain 3 does not start with a vocal reciting tone. But, when the voice does repeat a note for a line-closing liquidation, it is D♮ (mm. 20–21). At the end of quatrain 3, the poetic line urging the beloved to drive away intention (line 12) is given a significant harmonic treatment. An unexpected slip from EMm^7 to D major harmonically enacts a loss of tonal directionality, while the ascending oscillation figure lends ecstatic texture to the moment (mm. 23–24). Like quatrains 1 and 5, quatrain 4 starts with a vocal reciting tone, but it is D♮, not D♯ (m. 26).

But the perception of this form is belied by contradictory or complicating factors. The restatement of X at the beginning of quatrain 2 suggests a kind of strophic variation. Similarly,

[87] Mark DeVoto, *Debussy and the Veil of Tonality: Essays on His Music* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2004), 59–60.

albeit much more obliquely, the beginning of quatrain 3 (mm. 18–21) recalls the harmonic oscillations that began quatrain 1 (mm. 1–7). At the same time, the contrast of Y evokes ternary structure; indeed, the music for this quatrain not only sets the poem's central stanza, it occupies the song's central span.[88] Then, in quatrain 4, rather than fulfilling ternary expectation by returning to X, Debussy presents a new figuration, Z. While contrasting to Y, Z is also linked to Y by triplet subdivisions. This simultaneous use of contrast and continuity complicates definitive formal articulation. Finally, the return of X in quatrain 5 curtails any through-composed narrative. And yet the reprise is itself interrupted by yet another kind of return—a quotation from his 1882 setting.

Figure 2.7. Synopsis: poetry and music in the 1892 setting of "En sourdine"[89]

Poetry	Quatrain 1	Quatrain 2	Quatrain 3	Quatrain 4	Quatrain 5
Music	X	X	Y	Z	X—Quote—X
Voice	D♯	D♯	D♮	D♮	D♯

Agency, Rhetorical Focus, and Teleology

The 1882 setting of "En sourdine" recreated Verlaine's five-part arch-form rhetoric, although Debussy mapped poetic quatrain 4 (rather than quatrain 3) onto the center of his musical arch. In the 1892 setting, with its deliberate formal uncertainties, the sense of rhetorical focus is correspondingly less clear.[90] As we will see, the developing agential relationship between voice and piano plays a critical role in conveying different kinds of musical intensity, as well as a subtle sense of teleological development.

[88] There are seventeen measures before quatrain 3 and eighteen measures after it.
[89] This figure summarizes information presented in more detail in figure 2.6, above.
[90] Leßmann also notes that, in contrast to the 1882 setting, the 1892 setting has a "series of small high points" (Serie kleiner Höhenpunkte). Leßmann, "Debussy und Verlaine," 74.

Subtle Influence

In quatrains 1 and 2, motive X presents a memorable and apparently independent melody that originally spans four measures. However, developing her insight into Debussy's gamelan allusion, Annegret Fauser claims that in the first two stanzas of his 1892 setting, Debussy "explores the characteristic heterophonic relationship of a gamelan performance between melodic instrument (usually the *suling* in Sundanese gamelan) and voice."[91] Because the piano states X first, it influences the vocal line, which gradually attains the fully formed idea stated initially by the piano.[92] Yet, because Debussy varies the rhythmic gestures and metric placements of the vocal and piano parts, and because the voice traces only part of the melodic profile of X, these heterophonic connections are less noticeable. Thus, when X is in play, the agential kinship between piano and voice is veiled, and thus "muted."

Textural Repleteness, Vocal Persuasion

In contrast to X, Y's pattern spans only one bar (or, two bars before it repeats exactly), and its more animated arpeggiated texture is figural and accompanimental rather than thematic. The earlier sense of agential influence between piano and voice is no longer operative. As Taylor-Horrex observes, here "triplets envelop the voice in chromatic harmonies [. . .] which replace the earlier simpler pentatonic scale, a far richer sound conveying fulfilment."[93] Taylor-Horrex notes that "this process of envelopment is reversed across the setting as a whole."[94] In the textural sense, unlike the 1882 setting, the 1892 setting focuses musical intensity on the third

[91] Fauser, *Musical Encounters*, 201. She notes in particular mm. 8–9 and 14–15, but m. 6 shows a similarly heterophonic relationship.
[92] We will see a similar play of heterophony and influence at work in "Le jet d'eau."
[93] Taylor-Horrex, *Verlaine*, 78.
[94] Ibid.

poetic quatrain. Characterized by a more memorably song-like vocal part,[95] the setting of quatrain 3 is also more rhapsodic than the previous two quatrains. The vocal phrases begin to initiate on the downbeat rather than always arising on the offbeat.[96] Thus, rather than mimicking the poetic images of passivity, this setting enhances Verlaine's turn to more emphatic persuasion.

Union of Voice and Piano

But quatrain 3 is not the song's unequivocal focal point. With Z, Debussy creates another kind of intensity, both metaphorical and dynamic. Because Z is the final stage in the piano's succession of new thematic identities and agential roles (X→Y→Z), it underscores the importance of quatrain 4 as a goal achieved. Rather than creating a kind of subtle heterophony (like X), or a complementary accompaniment (like Y), Z parallels the vocal line. Thus joined with the voice, it presents a symbol of merging—with the beloved, and/or with Nature. Indeed, Z arises just as the voice ends that poetic line (line 12, mm. 23–24). And, as we have seen, the programmatic connection of this musical texture to Nature is strengthened by Z's oscillating motion, a figure that Debussy often uses to evoke the fluid and melancholy motion of water.[97]

Not only is the repetition cycle of Z shorter than either X or Y,[98] Debussy also increases the energy of the oscillation with a poco crescendo and "Animé" marking. The climax in m. 31 also calls for the work's loudest dynamic, *mf*.[99] In quatrain 4, Debussy highlights the union of the previously distinct agencies represented by the piano and vocal parts. In this sense, as a

[95] Note the combination of the arioso vocal line with melodic parallelism between the quatrain's two phrases. While the first stanza shows a similar, quasi-parallel patterning, it also makes more prominent use of repeated notes in the style of a reciting tone.
[96] At the beginning of quatrain 3 (m. 18) and at the beginning of both couplets in quatrain 4 (mm. 26, 29), the voice starts on the downbeat.
[97] As I have said, in this instance the reference is metaphorical: the speaker describes "waves" of grass (line 16, m. 30).
[98] Z may be understood as either a two-bar pattern or a two-*eighth-note* pattern.
[99] Meister observes that the climax is both dynamic and melodic, since it is here that the quatrain's "tightly reined melody is finally allowed to soar." "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 230.

thematically and texturally merged singularity, the orchestration of this quatrain abandons individual intentionality, just as the speaker has urged (line 12).

Ventriloquism and Temporal Disorientation

In quatrain 5, the return of X reinstates the original thematic material along with the piano's more independent role. We are, in some sense, back at the beginning. This move thus creates a musical re-beginning for quatrain 5's new poetic focus, a description of the projected outcome. At the same time, Debussy layers the oscillation of the preceding passage (Z) with X, a thematic integration that helps signal closure.[100] Besides conveying both re-beginning and ending, the reprise of *earlier* music (X) is particularly confounding, given the poem's turn to descriptions of *future* events.

The quatrain's use of borrowed material only enhances this disorientation. The vocal line quotes from the shared vocal/piano material in quatrains 3 and 5 of Debussy's 1882 "En sourdine," now varied and transposed into B major. (In the 1892 setting, mm. 36–39 are most similar to mm. 46–49 of the 1882 setting; see figures 2.8 and 2.9, below). Understood as a quotation,[101] the passage emphasizes the sense of temporal confusion: Debussy references an even more distant musical past precisely where the poem's speaker changes to the future tense ("will sing," line 20). In association with the speaker's evocation of the nightingale, the musical quotation also introduces another agency, that of the couple's externalized despair.

[100] As Richard S. Parks explains, Debussy often "synthesizes" thematic materials during the final section of a work. *The Music of Claude Debussy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 222.

[101] Indeed, Debussy repeatedly associated "En sourdine" with the process of quotation. As Wright observes, the composer's 1904 setting of "Colloque sentimental" quotes the 1892 version of "En sourdine" ("Verlaine and Debussy," 629). Noting that "En sourdine" and "Colloque sentimental" are found side-by-side in Verlaine's poetic collection, and that Debussy placed "En sourdine" as the first song in his *Fêtes galantes* series 1 and "Colloque sentimental" as the last song in his *Fêtes galantes* series 2, DeVoto argues that "the melodic similarity is a cyclic connection, even a precisely symmetrical one." *Veil of Tonality*, 59.

Figure 2.8 "En sourdine" (1882), mm. 46–49[102]

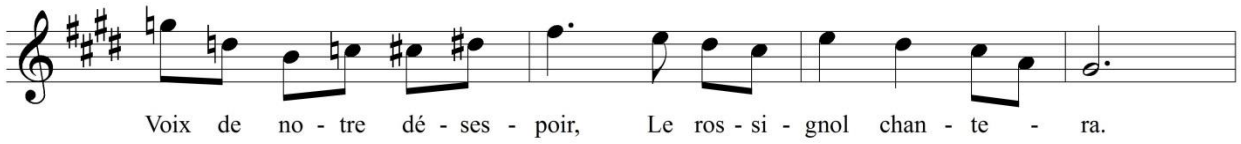
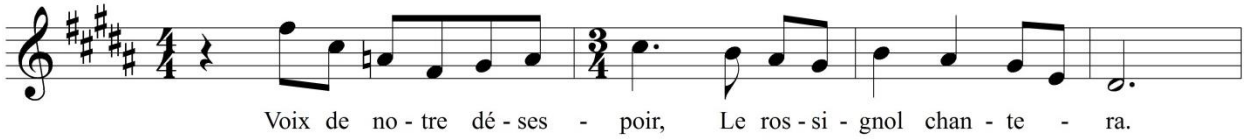


Figure 2.9 "En sourdine" (1892), mm. 36–39[103]



Even if we construe the quotation as merely a *revision* of the earlier setting—rather than as making an intertextual *reference* to the earlier setting, the passage is still marked for attention. Beginning in m. 36, changes in tempo and dynamics support dramatic differences in the vocal line and convey a sense of distance.[104] The quotation begins on F♯5—the highest vocal note of the entire setting—and traces an octave-length arpeggio, thus creating a strong contrast to the low-register and primarily stepwise melody of the vocal line in mm. 33–35. Bordered on both sides by X, the line predicting bird song sounds alien, extracted.

In quatrain 5, Debussy thus creates two ironic layers of temporal disorientation, while at the same time using quotation as a means of suggesting the lovers' synthesized and ventriloquized voice. Verlaine's poem suggests the displacement of human despair as the nightingale assumes the role of that expressive voice. Debussy's 1892 setting makes a similar move by giving the expression of this line to another—borrowed—music. But rather than mimicking the nightingale's call, the qualities of the quoted music are reminiscent of a kind of

[102] Score excerpt based on the manuscript facsimile found in Debussy, *Collection de fac-similés*, vol. 2.
[103] Score excerpt based on Claude Debussy, (1903) 1981, *Fêtes galantes* (Paris: E. Fromont; reprint, New York: Dover Editions, *Claude Debussy: Songs, 1880-1904*).
[104] Without acknowledging the passage as a quotation, Meister describes its effect: "Despite the high note [. . .] on which the melody for the last two lines of text begins, the slow tempo and very quiet dynamic range make this last vocal statement seem distant and resigned." "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 230.

popular, romantic aria: slow tempo, four-bar phrasing, triple meter, vocal range larger than an octave, and a mix of arpeggiated and scalar motion.

Does the dramatic change of style merely serve to emphasize the distance between this borrowed voice and the setting as a whole? Is the rhapsodic quality of the passage employed as symbol of persuasion, an obvious choice for setting a poetic entreaty? The quotation further complicates the poem's internal tensions by connecting poetic despair with a multi-layered musical nostalgia. The listener may interpret this juxtaposition in a number of ways: as a random coincidence (as in, "it doesn't matter what musical style is evoked, so long as it affords a rhetorical break"), as a predictable approach to text-setting (as in, "use a persuasive musical style for poetry that attempts to persuade"), or as a modernist manifesto (as in, "music that relies too heavily on the past sounds like despair"). Then, too, the melody's contour provides a dramatic sigh of regret. Ultimately, the setting does not clarify which, if any, of these interpretations is to be preferred.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in the 1892 Setting of "En Sourdine"

In the 1892 setting, each new quatrain of the song represents both stasis and progress. Because the setting denies clarity of both form and rhetorical intent, it turns the listener's attention to the immediacy of experience. Similarly, although the development of agential relationships between piano and voice apparently traces a forward-oriented thread throughout the song, this teleology is undermined in the final quatrain by a double-layered reference to the past at precisely the moment the poem addresses the future. Memory (already invoked by the pastoral topic and variation techniques of the opening quatrains) is here musically connected with the poetic future. And yet, whether this connection simply results from temporal "othering" (the past and the future may be paradigmatically equated in the sense that neither is the *present*) or is

meant to communicate pointed irony, remains unclear. Thus, rather than achieving the clarity characteristic of a Romantic-era denouement, Debussy constructs a musical seduction whose cumulative effect is disorientation.

Separated by ten years, the two settings of "En sourdine" nevertheless demonstrate some of the enduring aspects of Debussy's style. As these examples show, Debussy's music both enacts and contends with his chosen poetic texts. This "chimerical" relationship is not merely an attribute of his late works but appears in earlier contexts as well. Debussy deploys musical topics both structurally and rhetorically, not merely pictorially or evocatively. Implicating theme, style, and form,[105] his approach to temporality is complex and layered, managing to evoke conflicting times simultaneously: both static and progressive, both past and future. Although the development of agential relationships may suggest an underlying teleological design, the culmination of the agential narrative may be misaligned with the poem's rhetorical focus or otherwise undercut by conflicting musical cues. The composer's careful manipulation of his materials thus gives rise to strategies of the "conditional" or "suggested," rather than the definitive or closed, and both songs conclude with the type of uncertainty associated with ambiguity (that is, multiple interpretations are possible, but none is definitive). A similar rhetoric of suggestion will emerge as a crucial hallmark of the composer's engagement with his poetic texts.

[105] In other examples, we shall explore tonal functioning more closely in it role of promoting temporal progression or connection.

Chapter 3. Repetition and Change:

"Rondeau" (1882), "Le jet d'eau" (1889), "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" (1904), and "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" (1904)

Refrain and the Rhetoric of Suggestion

The four songs discussed in this chapter incorporate poems in which the refrain is a crucial formal and rhetorical element. Not only does the poetic refrain delineate formal boundaries, this recurring feature must often be reinterpreted in light of material presented in each preceding verse. Similarly, Debussy's settings employ musical refrains and reinterpretations as vital aspects of musical form and rhetoric.

The use of repetition—often considered a hallmark of the composer's style—changed over the course of his compositional development. As Sylveline Bourion observes, in Debussy's earlier works, repetition and variation is found at the level of the larger formal section, whereas in the later works, the burden of repetition is carried instead at the level of the motive.[106] Debussy's rondeau setting (1882) is separated from those of the rondels (1904) by more than twenty years. Yet, as we shall see, this chapter's cross-section of refrain forms (which includes his 1889 "Le jet d'eau") reveals certain consistencies of compositional strategy. In these four songs Debussy often pairs poetic recurrence—especially the refrain—with a recurring thematic idea in either the voice (as a refrain) or the piano (as a characteristic motive) or both. But the poetic and musical refrains are not always aligned, and the structural conflicts between poem and music contribute to a richly emergent meaning.

[106] Bourion, *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 258–59.

Debussy's settings also evoke multiple agencies that create additional levels of interpretation and temporality. Of particular interest is the composer's use of "speaking melody,"[107] in which the piano introduces or echoes sung melodies. Through deliberate misalignments of poetic and musical refrains, and the association of musical ideas across refrain boundaries, Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion counters the predictability of the poetic refrains and enhances the poetry's already elusive qualities.

Classicism and Subversion within the Pastoral Mode

The rondeau and both rondels belong to the classical *formes fixes* tradition. All three of these poems make use of a "derived" refrain, in which the first lines of the poem are also used to *close* subsequent stanzas. While the structure of "Le jet d'eau" is idiosyncratic, it uses the classical sonnet as its verse structure, in alternation with a long poetic refrain. In addition to the classicism and refrain-form common to these four poems, Debussy's settings all operate within the pastoral mode.[108] Yet each song engages with the pastoral expressive genre in a different way. Debussy's music for "Rondeau" repeatedly stages rhetorical breaks into subdominant space, these ruptures perhaps indicating the unreality of an idealized love. In "Le jet d'eau," the rococo berceuse of the fountain's melody evolves from theme to dreamy arabesque, then returns to consciousness in the music of the sixth quatrain, opening an ecstatic porousness between the opposed functions of verse and refrain. In "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the vocal refrain serves as catalyst rather than stabilizer, and each musical stanza mirrors the poem's change of season by rehearsing the same change of key. The static hum of the introduction for

[107] Kramer, "Speaking Melody," 127.
[108] Robert S. Hatten describes several markers of the pastoral mode, including a retreat from complexity, an attempt to recapture a lost euphoric state, and an "idealized space of reflection or serenity." *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 55–56. More specifically, "the pastoral has a tendency toward milder expressivity, typically achieved by greater consonance, simpler harmonies, pedal points, more flowing melodic lines, and so forth." Ibid., 83.

"Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," on the other hand, inaugurates a setting that turns attention away from the poem *per se*, and to its echoic resonance in the imagination of its reader.

"Rondeau"

The poetic narrative of "Rondeau" counters the image of enfolding with that of separation (see line 13). Over the course of the poem, the three-word poetic refrain ("Fut-il jamais?") is thus transformed, its rhetorical question expressing first confidence, then despair. In parallel, Debussy's setting establishes an idealized pastoral mode (an "enfolding" by topical serenity and simplicity) and then repeatedly undermines it in multiple ways (hence, separation by "scattering"). This subversion of the pastoral mode engenders a deceptive pastoral subtype that the composer will employ in later works, as we will see. Debussy's song also engages refrain logic in two ways. While the treatment of his original vocal refrain—the motive that first sets the poetic refrain—is variously characterized by change and anxiety, the piano's recurring material consistently works to reestablish stability. In the next two sections, I consider how Musset thematizes the opposition of enfolding and separation.

Enfolding

The central image of Alfred de Musset's "Rondeau" is that of enfolding, particularly when enfolding confines an otherwise untamed subject. Manon lies "within" the speaker's arms (line 2); he hears her heartbeat "within" her breast (line 4). The bee is "enclosed" within the flower (line 7); the speaker "cradle[s]" Manon (line 8). The poem's narrative confines the second stanza's figurative, pastoral countryside within the third stanza's refined interior.

Figure 3.1. Alfred de Musset, "Rondeau," Poesies nouvelles, *1850*

	Rondeau		Rondeau
1	**Fut-il jamais**[109] douceur de coeur pareille	*a*	**Was there ever** a sweetness of heart like
2	À voir Manon dans mes bras sommeiller?	*b*	Seeing Manon sleeping in my arms?
3	Son front coquet parfume l'oreiller;	*b*	Her coquettish forehead perfumes the pillow;
4	Dans son beau sein j'entends son coeur qui veille.	*a*	Within her beautiful breast I hear her heart keeping watch.
5	Un songe passe, et s'en vient l'égayer.	*b*	A dream passes, and comes to make her happy.
6	Ainsi s'endort la[110] fleur d'églantier,	*b*	Thus the flower of the wild rosebush goes to sleep,
7	Dans son calice enfermant une abeille.	*a*	Within its calyx enclosing a bee.
8	Moi, je la berce ; un plus charmant métier	*b*	Me, I cradle [rock] her; a more charming occupation
9	**Fut-il jamais?**	*R*	**Was there ever?**
10	Mais le jour vient, et l'Aurore vermeille	*a*	But the day comes, and vermillion Dawn
11	Effeuille au vent son printemps virginal.[111]	*x*	Scatters [sheds] to the wind her virginal springtime.
12	Le peigne en main et la perle à l'oreille,	*a*	Comb in hand and pearl in her ear,
13	À son miroir Manon va[112] m'oublier.	*b*	At her mirror Manon is going to forget me.
14	Hélas! l'amour sans lendemain ni veille	*a*	Alas! Love without tomorrow or the day before[113]
15	**Fut-il jamais?**	*R*	**Was it ever?**

[109] Bold font highlights the derived refrain.
[110] Debussy substitutes "la" for Musset's original "une." Cobb, *Poetic Debussy*, 47n1.
[111] Debussy substitutes "printemps virginal" for Musset's original "bouquet printanier" (ibid., 47n2).
[112] Debussy substitutes "va" for Musset's original "court" (ibid., 47n3).
[113] At the end of line 14, Musset reuses the word "veille" from the end of line 4. This repetition is not replicated in the English translation due to the word's change in function. The verb "veiller"—which is the function used in line 4—means "to keep watch." The noun "veille"—which is the function used in line 14—typically refers to the span of time the watch is kept: the eve of an event, a designation which may apply to the entire day before.

Musset's situation of the poem within a preexisting literary tradition also highlights this prevailing theme. Published in 1850, "Rondeau" is a neoclassical variation on the medieval *forme fixe*. The poem follows a traditional fifteen-line, 5 + 4 + 6 stanza form, although its partial-line refrain demonstrates a stylistic adaptation of the later rondeau.[114] By framing the work, the poem's derived refrain also enacts enfolding in a general, structural sense ("Fut-il jamais?" serves as both first and last line).[115]

Musset's "Rondeau" displays still other, more idiosyncratic variations on the rondeau form, and many of these innovations enable the poem's sonic design to exemplify enfolding. Musset's ten-syllable line is slightly longer than the eight-syllable standard. More significantly, by increasing the number of alternating rhymes (*rimes croisées*), he creates an interwoven rhyme scheme.[116] Furthermore, the poet's careful approximation of the two rhyme sounds (for example, "oreiller" vs. "veille") effectively minimizes the expected difference between them. The similarity of ending sounds extends to the refrain ("fut-il jamais" in lines 1, 9, and 15).

In addition to homogenizing the end-rhyme sounds, Musset uses exact verbal repetition to achieve a dense, reverberating sound texture. This strategy also evokes enfolding or enclosure, since the presence of an echo implies a bounded space. "Coeur" from line 1 returns in line 4, and "veille" ends both lines 4 and 14. Similarly, "oreiller" closes line 3 and "oreille" closes line 13.

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[114] According to John Fox, in the classic rondeau "the beginning of the first section is repeated at the end of the second and again at the end of the third." In contrast, "in the post-sixteenth-century rondeau only the beginning of the first line is repeated and is not incorporated into the rhyme pattern." *The Lyric Poetry of Charles d'Orléans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 116.

[115] Any *rondeau* (or *rondel*) would use a similar kind of framing (derived) refrain. However, Musset's nineteenth-century adaptation of this medieval poetic structure could suggest a more pointed and intentional connection between theme and structure than—for instance—Charles d'Orléans's use of the *rondel*, which was one of the primary poetic forms of his time.

[116] Although the tradition allows for many variations, the classic fifteen-line *rondeau* follows the rhyme pattern *aabba, aabR, aabbaR,*. Musset's pattern is *abbab babR ababaR*. As J. M. Cocking notes, Musset "altered the order of the rhymes." "The 'Invention' of the Rondel," *French Studies* 1 (1951): 51.

Close phonic cousins enhance this effect. Examples include "douceur" and "coeur" in line 1; "vient" in lines 5 and 10, and the alliterative "vent" in line 11.

Scattering

But the *volta*[117] enacted by final stanza counteracts the poem's enclosing elements. The entrance of day shatters the spell (line 10): just as Aurora scatters her spring bouquet to the wind (line 11), Manon will leave the speaker (line 13). These dissenting forces transform the three-word refrain. In its first two appearances it is confident. In line 1, "was there ever?" could be more prosaically rephrased as "there has never been." The same is true of its reiteration in line 9, where the inversion of syntax emphasizes its exclusionary character: the speaker, fully in the moment, appears emphatically certain. Because of the changes—that is, the dispersals—of the third stanza, the refrain is finally placed into a different, more painful temporal context. The rhetorical question moves from confidence to despair: if love has no persistence, did it ever exist? Despite the work's multidimensional representations of repetition and enclosing, this experience of love fails to be captured. Instead, the speaker's sentiments are contained *within* his own heart, and do not find true answer. In Manon's mirror, she sees only herself; her lover is forgotten (line 13).

Debussy's Setting of Musset's "Rondeau" (1882)

Debussy's setting both invokes and disturbs the pastoral themes of Musset's poem. In accord with the poem's literary mode and references to nature, the musical setting exhibits strong pastoral characteristics. Tonicizations of both the subdominant and Neapolitan give plagal emphasis to the work's major key. Debussy uses pedal points freely, in both the bass and soprano

[117] The *volta* is a poem's turning point. This rhetorical turn typically coincides with a formal articulation—in this case, the beginning of the final stanza.

registers, and enriches the tonic harmony with added sixths. The vocal line is flowing and melodic; its undulating contours allow for high notes without overly dramatic emphasis. Although Debussy's thematic and framing elements arise within the pastoral topic, his leitmotivic treatment of a refrain element serves as an agent of dramatic unease. The song's subtle form, which supports multiple interpretations, belies the simplicity of its pastoral materials. Finally, as we shall see, repeated rhetorical breaks in subdominant space increasingly call into question the presumed stability of the pastoral mode itself.

Poetic Refrain and Formal Subtlety

Debussy's setting of "Rondeau" provides an early example of his treatment of the poetic refrain, a complex approach that he returns to in his late settings. Without completely identifying with either the (musical) medieval *rondeau* or classical rondo, Debussy's song uses a musical refrain as a critical element of its construction. There are, in fact, two components of the musical refrain: the piano's berceuse and the melodic motive that Debussy uses to set the poetic refrain "Fut-il jamais" (on the form diagram these are labeled as X and R, respectively).

The song's formal subtleties extend to its large-scale organization as well. Following the poem's three unequal stanzas, Debussy divides the setting into three sections whose musical similarities imply a set of strophic variations.[118] At the same time, other aspects of his composition create a through-composed trajectory. As we shall see, Debussy's refrain components are implicated in both the variational and through-composed designs.

[118] Roy Howat observes that Golden-Section patterning in the early songs is usually "fragmentary, involving only one or two events in the piece concerned, and telling us nothing important about the forms (or the sensations)." However, he also notes that in both "Zéphyr" and "Rondeau," "the GS is achieved by a change of metre, and the numbers involved catch the eye [since they belong to the Lucas integer series]." Specifically, in "Rondeau," stanza 2 begins after 29 units of 3/8, and stanza 3 begins after 47 units of 3/8). *Debussy in Proportion*, 34.

Figure 3.2. Music and poetry in "Rondeau"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
piano motive	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X′	X′	R!		X	X	
harmonic area	I						V^7/IV →			IV		(N)	I		
vocal refrain & cadenza			R				*R?*					C	*R*		
poetic line			*1*		*2*		*3*		*4*			*5*			
rhyme			*R—a*		*b*		*b*		*a*			*b*			
stanza			Stanza 1												

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
X + X′	X + X′	X + X′	X + X′		X		X	
chromatic sequence		iv^7 ♭III (plagal-type cadence to A)		vii^{o7}/V	$I^{6/4}$ iii ii7 V I			
						C—*R*		
6		*7*		*8*———*9*				
b		*a*		*b*———*R*				
Stanza 2								

25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37
R! X″	R! X″	X″	X″	X″	X″	X″				X	X	
vi		♭IV? (=III)		V^7/♭III?		V^7/♭VI		(N)	V^7 I			
								C———*R*				
10		*11*		*12*		*13*		*14*———*15*				
a		*x**		*a*		*b*		*a*———*R*				
Stanza 3												

Notes:

X: the piano's characteristic motive (X) is also used in varied, liquidated forms: X′ (continuous rocking 16th notes) and X″ (continuous off-beat 16th notes)

R: vocal (and poetic) refrain. In the vocal line, R indicates the original vocal refrain and *R* indicates a varied version of the vocal refrain. R! shows where the vocal refrain is actually sounded by the piano.

C: a vocal cadenza

R, a, b: the rondeau's derived refrain (*R*) first appears at the beginning of line 1("Fut-il jamais"). The poem alternates between two end rhymes, (*a* and *b*).

***** In m. 28, Debussy changes Musset's "bouquet printanier" (which would have supplied end-rhyme *b*) to "printemps virginal."

Piano Refrain

The piano's berceuse (X on the form diagram, above) is signaled by the 6/8 meter, major key, an ostinato-like alternation between I^{add6} and V^{M9}, and a tempo marking of Andantino. The characteristic rhythmic motive of this berceuse is a rocking oscillation of sixteenth notes to an agogic quarter-note accent on the second part of the compound beat. Like the derived refrain of the literary *rondeau* form, the berceuse is the first idea presented, and it returns to close subsequent formal sections.

While the meaning of the poetic refrain changes dramatically between stanzas 2 and 3, Debussy's piano berceuse does not reflect a similar change. Like the words themselves, this part of the musical refrain holds steady, placing the poem's interpretational shift into greater relief. And, unlike the poetic refrain, Debussy reasserts the musical refrain at the end of all three stanzas. Because the berceuse topic functions reliably—even over-enthusiastically—as a refrain, and because it correlates with musical stability and tonal closure, Debussy's use of this characteristic motive musically supports the theme of "enfolding" expressed in the poem.

Throughout the work, this characteristic motive is most closely associated with F♯ major, the song's tonal center, and a key Debussy repeatedly chose for programmatic evocations of fragility and spring.[119] In the first stanza, the berceuse figuration persists until m. 9, where the

[119] For example, F♯ major is also the opening key of the composer's 1887 *Printemps* ("*Spring*"), a symphonic suite for female choir, piano, and orchestra. The idealized, vernal serenity of the F♯-major key area also recurs in act IV, scene 4 of *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1895). As Mélisande avers that she has loved Pelléas always, ever since she first saw him ("Depuis toujours . . . Depuis que je t'ai vu"), her statement is accompanied by the modulation to F♯. However, once established, this key area belongs to Pelléas alone, who compares Mélisande's voice to an angel's, to a springtime breeze blowing across the sea. Roger Nichols explains this passage of "traditional" harmony as depicting "Pelléas's naïve expression of a passion new to him." "Synopsis," in Nichols and Richard Langham Smith, *Claude Debussy:* Pelléas et Mélisande (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 75. In fact, as soon as Debussy rescinds the six-sharp key signature, Mélisande insists that she never lies, except to Pelléas's brother ("je ne mens jamais, je ne mens qu'à ton frère . . ."). The listener is led to interpret the tonal serenity of the F♯-major key area as suspect or fragile—just as this love may be.

clear F♯ triad is undermined.[120] When F♯ major is regained at the end of the stanza (mm. 13–15), the berceuse returns as well. At the beginning of stanza 2, Debussy alludes to the berceuse by using its rhythmic motive as part of the opening chromatic sequence (mm. 16–17), recalling the beginning of stanza 1 without recreating its harmonic stability. In m. 21, an "arrival six-four" with berceuse figuration suggests an early return to F♯. Instead, both the harmonic return and the berceuse figuration are momentarily interrupted (m. 22) before returning together at the end of the stanza (m. 23). At the beginning of stanza 3, the harmony is again unstable, and the berceuse is absent. It finally returns, along with the F♯ tonic, at the close of the song (mm. 35–36).

Vocal Refrain: "Fut-il jamais"

Despite its nominal refrain function, the "Fut-il jamais" motive is the less predictable of the two refrain elements. When this motive appears in the vocal line, successive repetitions are varied, and the motive helps to delineate the song's formal structure in conjunction with the piano berceuse. In contrast, when appearing as a leitmotive in the piano, it retains its original form but is no longer supported by the berceuse. In these instances, this "speaking melody" serves as a reminder of lost stability.

The first vocal setting of the poetic refrain is, itself, an enfolding, gap-fill[121] gesture (F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯, m. 3). Ending with an ascending step, its shape mimics the rising voice inflection characteristic of interrogative speech. But, because the vocal melody continues, tracing an overall descending contour, it quickly overrides the questioning quality of the refrain's small ascent. The musical setting thus reflects the refrain's poetic sense: although the speaker begins as if asking a question, the poem's continuation indicates that this question is only intended in the rhetorical sense: the speaker is actually making a confident assertion.

[120] Footnotes 126 and 127 provide a more detailed discussion of this harmonic event.
[121] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 130–35.

As noted above, the vocal line never repeats the refrain motive in its original form. At the beginning of the second phrase (m. 7) and the beginning of the second verse (m. 16) the vocal line obliquely references the refrain. These allusions are inconclusive at best, perhaps especially since they do not accompany the poetic refrain.[122] When the poetic refrain does return, at the final cadences of stanzas 2 and 3 (mm. 22–23 and 34–35), variations on the vocal refrain emphasize closure: "Fut-il jamais" is set to F♯ (or F♮)—D♯–E♯–C♯–C♯.[123] Thus, Debussy's vocal "refrain" constantly registers change; just as each poetic context is slightly different, the refrain alters to accommodate its changing contexts.

Separated from both the vocal line and the piano's berceuse, the enfolding gesture returns as a leitmotif in the accompaniment.[124] When sung, the vocal refrain is varied; but when transferred to the piano, the "vocal" refrain preserves its original intervallic form. Yet, its new contexts also suggest new interpretations. It first recurs in the piano interlude of stanza 1 (G♮–F♯–D♮–E♮, mm. 11–12; compare to F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯, m. 3), where its return is highlighted by a preparatory crescendo and ascending arpeggio, and its first note sounds simultaneously with a rolled chord that marks the utterance as significant. The surprise of the Neapolitan harmony, that sublime incarnation of the plagal area, lends this return a rarefied quality. The dramatic recall of the motive thus occurs in an idealized, pastoral space. Indeed, the singer's next line, unaccompanied, is "A dream passes" (m. 12).

[122] In m. 7, the vocal line repeats the rhythm of the vocal refrain. Melodically, mm. 7–8 repeat the first note and the last six notes of mm. 3–4. Thus, while m. 7 does *not* repeat the vocal refrain, it recreates the refrain's original context, thereby alluding to it through its marked absence. In m. 16–17, the vocal line repeats the rhythm of mm. 3–4. While it does not repeat the original melody, the descending melodic contour of its upper notes is roughly similar.
[123] The vocal cadence of the first stanza is also clearly related, although the poetic refrain does not appear there (F♯–E♯–D♯–C♯, m. 13).
[124] As we will see, Debussy employs a similar strategy in "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte." The piano melody of m. 20 recreates the vocal refrain sung previously in mm. 5 and 13.

At the start of stanza 3, while the vocal part contrasts with previous stanzas, the piano's restatement of the "enfolding" leitmotiv (F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯, mm. 25–26) recalls the beginnings of stanza 1 and, obliquely, of stanza 2.[125] However, the repetition of the "enfolding" leitmotiv as an incipient ostinato, and the addition of accompanying, off-beat sixteenth notes, imbue the "vocal" refrain with an agitated quality diametrically opposed to the calm of the original berceuse. Thus, the piano's "speaking melody" poignantly repeats the refrain question "Fut-il jamais" just as the voice sings the poetic *volta*—with the dawn comes the realization that the speaker's love is insubstantial, fleeting.

Strophic Variations

Although the three large-scale sections—both musical and poetic—are unequal in length, several factors encourage the listener to hear them as a set of strophic variations. Debussy repeats particular features (including the refrain elements) and replicates a similar energetic pattern in each of the three sections.

As noted above (footnote 122), the vocal melodies that begin stanzas 1 and 2 (mm. 3–4 and mm. 16–17) share the same rhythm. Additionally, in both cases, the upper part of the compound melody traces a descending line (F♯–E♯–D♯–C♯ in mm. 1–3, and D–C♯–C♮–B in mm. 16–17). Going further, the vocal melodies in mm. 7–10 (stanza 1) and 16–19 (stanza 2) are also identical rhythmically, although their melodic contours differ. This rhythmic repetition highlights a poetic repetition in Musset's text, which aligns literal and imagistic language through the use of an identical grammatical construction. Both sentences begin with the same adverb, "within." But the literal description "Dans son beau sein . . ." from line 4 is transformed to the figurative "Dans son calice . . . ." in line 7. The third stanza is also a variational foil for the first. As we have seen,

[125] At the beginning of stanza 3, Debussy recreates the original motive exactly, but submerges it below the vocal line, an octave lower than its original tessitura.

“Fut-il jamais” returns at the beginning of the third stanza—but not in the vocal part. Instead, it returns (“expressif”) in the piano as a repeated leitmotif (mm. 25–26).

With regard to the energetic pattern of each stanza, all three sections begin with the piano’s figural evocation of motion. The rocking sixteenth-notes of the opening berceuse are recalled at the beginning of the second section (m. 16), and the animated return of the leitmotive projects another type of kinetic energy at the beginning of the third section (m. 25). Then, each of the three sections is brought to a halt when piano and voice rhetorically break the flow of the lyrical berceuse for a brief recitative or cadenza (these are marked on the form diagram as “C”). In each of these passages (mm. 11–12, 20–22, and 33–34), Debussy uses theatrical rests in the vocal and/or piano parts, recitative-like rolled chords, and fermate to counter the previous figural momentum.

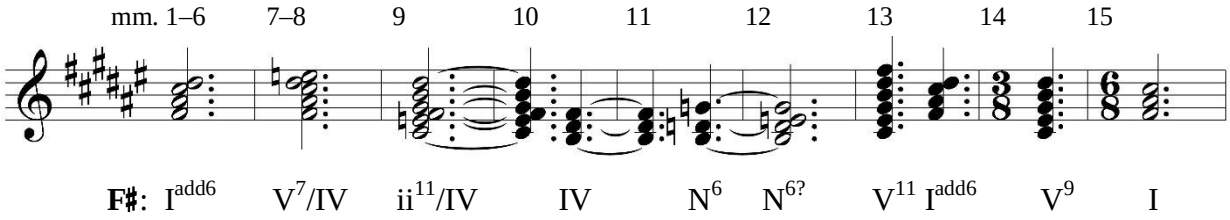
Each of these ruptures occurs just prior to a section’s final cadence, and in each, an improvisatory or recitative texture arises just where we might expect a vocal cadenza. However, these ersatz cadenzas blossom in plagal, not dominant space. (In stanza 2, this subdominant excursion is syntactically misplaced: occurring after the first evocation of the dominant, the retrogression into the supertonic subverts direct cadential action.) These repeated hiatuses in predominant space suggest pastoral retreats to a naïve, idealized world, one in which the love the speaker treasures could be real. Of course, that love cannot last. Each time, harmonic uncertainty or unpredictability precedes the same ending: an authentic cadence to F♯ elides with the return of the piano berceuse as the vocal line falls from F♯ to C♯ in a variation on the opening “Fut-il jamais” refrain.

Through-Composed

Despite obvious markers implying strophic variation, other elements of Debussy's setting are consistent with through-composed design. Except for the varied "Fut-il jamais" refrain that brings similarity to their final measures (mm. 12–13, 22–23, 33–35), the vocal contours of each stanza are quite different. And, although each stanza returns to the berceuse—and to the F♯ tonic—at its close, the increasing instability in the "episodic" portions of stanzas 2 and 3 suggests a quasi-teleological rather than purely recursive design.

In keeping with the pastoral mode, stanza 1 tonicizes the subdominant. In m. 7, the tonic pedal is destabilized by the addition of the lowered seventh, suggesting V^7/IV. But, rather than moving directly to B, Debussy temporarily forestalls this arrival with a retrogression to $c♯^{11}$.[126] In m. 10, the arrival on B suggests that this interpolated $c♯^{11}$ acts as a plagal embellishment to the subdominant (ii^{11}/IV in the overall key of F♯).[127] The stanza's textural break occurs in mm. 11–12, where Debussy moves to the Neapolitan.

Figure 3.3. Harmonic and textural reduction of "Rondeau," stanza 1

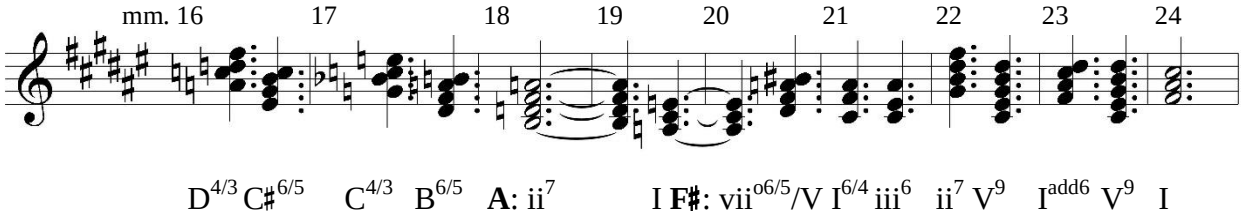


[126] Characteristically, tertian parsing of this harmony is not obvious: while the low, grace-note C♯ suggests a registral root, F♯ is also reiterated in its original bass register (cf. m. 1). The persistence of F♯ and E♮ (from m. 7) could imply a prolongation of the $F♯^7$ (V/IV) from m. 7, but that chord's third (A♯) is now absent. In contrast, all members of the $c♯^{11}$ chord are present: C♯–E–G♯–B–D♯–F♯.

[127] Alternately, the $c♯^{11}$ could potentially be interpreted as v^{11}/F♯, moving retrogressively to IV (B). It's true that the second halves of mm. 7 and 8 sound a similar c♯ harmony, as the piano recollects with difference ($F♯^{7\,(add6)}$–$C♯^9$) the tonic-dominant oscillations of mm. 1–6 ($F♯^{add6}$–$C♯^9$). However, to my ear, the destabilization of F♯ in mm. 7 and 8 is functional rather than simply colorful: although delayed, the arrival on B in m. 10 sounds like a tonicization rather than a retrogressive surprise. Debussy's use of the supertonic to substitute for and delay tonic (tonicized) arrival in "Rondeau" prefigures similar harmonic syntax in the much later song "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" from the *Promenoir des deux amants* (1910).

Stanzas 2 and 3 move beyond the relative harmonic naiveté of stanza 1 by tonicizing distantly related key areas and incorporating tonally non-functional or ambiguous passages. The second stanza begins with a descending sequence (falling fourths in the voice embellish the semitonal descent of chord roots, mm. 16–17) and then tonicizes A major (♭III), which arrives at the end of m. 19. Like the tonicization of IV in stanza 1, the arrival on ♭III is given plagal preparation (b^{7} acts as ii^{7}/A, mm. 18–19). Next, an applied dominant to V (b♯$^{o6/5}$) leads logically to the cadential 6/4 in measure 21. But Debussy moves retrogressively to ii^{7} (g♯^{7}) on the downbeat of m. 22—and this where he situates the stanza's rhetorical break.[128] It is only after this retreat to the supertonic that the dominant is sounded, closing to the tonic in measure 23.

Figure 3.4. Harmonic and textural reduction of "Rondeau," stanza 2



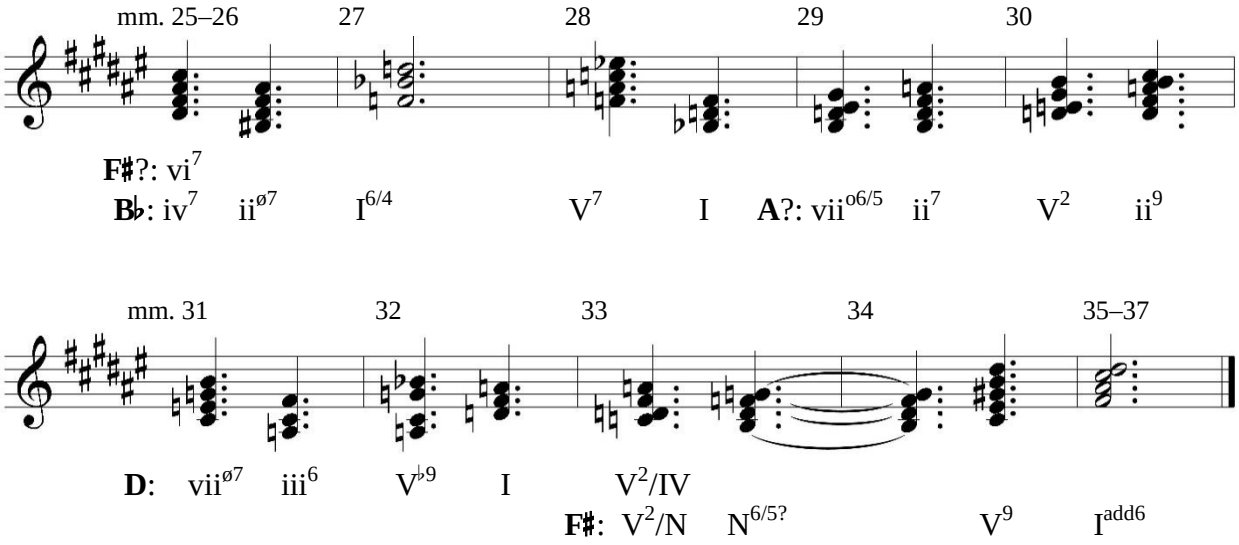
As discussed above, at the beginning of stanza 3, the voice presents new material while the piano carries the "enfolding" leitmotive. In this context, the piano temporarily asserts a stabilizing force that both counters and highlights a shifting harmonic center. The ostinato leitmotive is set to a non-progressive oscillation between d♯^{7} and b♯^{ø7} (mm. 25–26, see figure 3.5, below). Because of the F♯-major cadence at the end of stanza 2 (mm. 23–24), the d♯^{7} harmony at the beginning of stanza 3 initially sounds as vi^{7} (m. 25). But an "arrival six-four" and subsequent cadence to B♭ (mm. 27–28) imply a reinterpretation of the previous d♯^{7}–b♯^{ø7}

[128] Thus, although he does not replicate the progression from mm. 7–10 (wherein retrogression to the supertonic delays [local] tonic arrival: V^{7}/IV–ii^{11}/IV–IV), Debussy once again implicates the supertonic chord in retrogressive syntax.

oscillation as iv^{7}–ii^{ø7} in B♭. This appearance of the motive suggests a stubborn, anxious clinging to the past, despite present instability.

The tonicization of B♭ major (mm. 27–28) stabilizes a key area only distantly related to the original tonic (B♭ is enharmonically III♯ in the original key of F♯ major, a chromatic-mediant relationship). This unexpected harmonic arrival sets line 11 where, instead of Musset's phrase "bouquet printanier," the composer dramatically substitutes "printemps virginal." Debussy's significant rewording not only changes the text, it breaks the poem's lulling rhyme scheme. The bounded space evoked by Musset's echoing sounds is here effectively countered, suggesting not only the impermanence of love but also the impossibility of retaining even the illusion of love.

Figure 3.5. Harmonic and textural reduction of "Rondeau," stanza 3



As the passage builds to climax (mm. 29–30), Debussy oscillates between e♯^{o7} (≈g♯^{o7}) and b^{7} (and then between E^{7} and b^{7}),[129] suggesting a plagally inflected return to A major (♭III). Instead, the deceptive arrival on c♯^{ø7} in m. 31 points toward the D-major cadence in m. 32. The emphatic (sforzando) tonicization of D (♭VI) is then destabilized, just as it makes the pastoral

[129] While Briscoe's edition shows an E♯ in the piano for m. 29 and an E♮ for m. 30, similar figuration in both measures emphasizes the passage's repetitive quality.

turn to its subdominant in the rhetorical break of m. 33. On the second beat of m. 33, the major-minor G^7 sounds an unexpected harmonic color (the diatonic IV should carry a major seventh), and the final cadence (mm. 34–35) further reinterprets the G^7 as an (altered) Neapolitan in F♯. The third stanza thus establishes and destabilizes more pitch centers than the previous stanzas. Its textures are also less stable, with the piano's berceuse texture not returning until the end. Debussy also enhances the passage's energy and unrest with spirited performance indications that do not appear in previous stanzas.[130]

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Rondeau"

While Debussy's setting works within the pastoral mode, its musical strategies undermine this expressive contract through a subtle formal design that separates the components of the double musical refrain and in turn thematizes the rhetorical breaks. As we have seen, instead of functioning as a stabilizing device, the vocal "refrain" undergoes constant and significant variation. When the voice returns to this melodic material, the nominal repetitions are, at best, partial and allusive. Even when paired with the poetic refrain text, the varied vocal refrains only obliquely reference the original line. On the other hand, when Debussy transfers the vocal refrain to the piano, he unequivocally replicates the original vocal melody, suggesting an iconic memory. This leitmotivic use of the "enfolding" vocal refrain allows Debussy to imply a second, perhaps subconscious agency that disrupts the song's structure. Thus, whether partially or clearly recalled, the varied vocal refrains suggest that past certainty is irrecoverable.

Like the poem's derived refrain, the piano's berceuse refrain begins stanza 1 and closes stanzas 2 and 3. But, in contrast to the variable vocal refrain, the berceuse is more insistently stable than the poetic refrain. It returns to close stanza 1, whereas the poetic refrain does not.

[130] These include "animez un peu" (m. 25) and "animato" (m. 30) as well as the sforzando accent markings of mm. 32 and 33.

And it is also evoked at the beginning of stanza 2. Debussy counters this refrain's stable ubiquity with increasingly complex and unpredictable harmonic designs, suggesting a through-composed logic that belies the naïve tonality of the opening passage. Then too, repeated rhetorical breaks become an ironic hallmark of the song's stanzaic organization. The musical result is a fracturing of the pastoral mode, in which the listener comes to mistrust what should be the pastoral's most salient aspect—its stability.

"Le jet d'eau"

With "Le jet d'eau" we encounter a unique approach to the rhetoric of suggestion with regard to both Symbolist aesthetics and the rhetorical opposition of verse and refrain. As we will see, both poem and setting evoke ambiguous or multiple formal organizations. Debussy employs Baudelaire's symbol of the fountain, with its binary energy and eternal arc, as a means of musically establishing and undermining formal assumptions. Yet associations between Baudelaire's imagery and Debussy's music are fluid rather than fixed, enhancing the sense of contingency. Similarly, Debussy's stratification of syntactic threads and deliberate tonal disorientation further complicate the musical experience. While the pastoral mode undercuts potential Romantic climaxes,[131] textural plenitude and supercharged harmonic presentation elevate both mode and intensity. At the song's close, the erosion of boundaries between previously opposed musical elements gives rise to a Symbolist mirroring between the human and the natural, and fosters a troping of immediacy and distance.

[131] Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 60.

Figure 3.6. Charles Baudelaire, "Le jet d'eau," La petite revue, *July 8, 1865*

	Le jet d'eau		The fountain
1	Tes beaux yeux sont las, pauvre amante!	*a*	Your beautiful eyes are tired, poor lover!
2	Reste longtemps, sans les rouvrir,	*b*	Remain for a long time, without opening them,
3	Dans cette pose nonchalante	*a*	In this nonchalant pose
4	Où t'a surprise le plaisir.	*b*	In which pleasure surprised you.
5	Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui jase,	*c*	In the courtyard the fountain that gossips
6	Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,	*d*	And doesn't quiet itself either night nor day
7	Entretient doucement l'extase	*c*	Sweetly prolongs the ecstasy
8	Où ce soir m'a plongé l'amour.	*d*	Into which love plunged me this evening.
R1	La gerbe d'eau qui berce	*e*	The spray of water that rocks [as a cradle]
R2	Ses mille fleurs,	*f*	Its thousand flowers,
R3	Que la lune traverse	*e*	That the moon traverses
R4	De ses pâleurs,[132]	*f*	With its pallors,
R5	Tombe comme une averse	*e*	Falls like a shower
R6	De larges pleurs.	*f*	Of large tears.
9	Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie	*g*	Thus your soul that ignites
10	L'éclair brûlant des voluptés	*h*	The burning flash of pleasure
11	S'élance, rapide et hardie,	*g*	Springs [also: "darts" or "bounds"], rapid and daring,
12	Vers les vastes cieux enchantés.	*h*	Toward the vast, enchanted skies.
13	Puis elle s'épanche, mourante,	***a***	Then it pours out, dying,
14	En un flot de triste langueur,	***f***	In a gush of sad languor,
15	Qui par une invisible pente	***a***	That by an invisible slope
16	Descend jusqu'au fond de mon coeur.	***f***	Descends to the depths of my heart.
R1	La gerbe d'eau qui berce	*e*	The spray of water that rocks
R2	Ses mille fleurs,	*f*	Its thousand flowers,
R3	Que la lune traverse	*e*	That the moon traverses
R4	De ses pâleurs,	*f*	With its pallors,
R5	Tombe comme une averse	*e*	Falls like a shower
R6	De larges pleurs.	*f*	Of large tears.
17	O toi, que la nuit rend si belle,	*i*	O you, whom the night renders so beautiful,
18	Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers tes seins,	*j*	How sweet it is to me, leaning towards your breasts,
19	D'écouter la plainte éternelle	*i*	To listen to the eternal lament
20	Qui sanglote dans les bassins!	*j*	That sobs within the basins!
21	Lune, eau sonore, nuit bénie,	***g***	Moon, sonorous water, blessed night,
22	Arbres qui frissonnez autour,	***d***	Trees that shiver around,
23	Votre pure mélancolie	***g***	Your pure melancholy
24	Est le miroir de mon amour.	***d***	Is the mirror of my love.
R1	La gerbe d'eau qui berce	*e*	The spray of water that rocks
R2	Ses mille fleurs,	*f*	Its thousand flowers,
R3	Que la lune traverse	*e*	That the moon traverses
R4	De ses pâleurs,	*f*	With its pallors,
R5	Tombe comme une averse	*e*	Falls like a shower
R6	De larges pleurs.	*f*	Of large tears.

[132] In the 1865 publication of "Le jet d'eau" in *La petite revue*, Baudelaire's footnote provides an alternate version of the refrain, and it is this variant that Debussy chose to set to music. Debussy appears to have made an additional change, substituting "pâleurs" for Baudelaire's "leuers." Cobb, *Poetic Debussy*, 105nn1–2.

Theme and Style in Baudelaire's "Le jet d'eau"

First published in 1865,[133] Baudelaire's "Le jet d'eau" creates a nuanced evening scene, beautiful yet melancholy. Descriptions of water sobbing in the fountain's basins, moonbeams shining through the spray, the beloved's soul, and ecstasy bring to mind Verlaine's "Clair de lune," which was published five years later.[134] Baudelaire's poem has a single speaker, but frequent changes of style and focus create a kaleidoscopic effect. For instance, the style of address moves freely between imperative insistence, narrative description, and reflective soliloquy. Similarly, the focus of attention shifts easily between self and other, between human and nature, between present and past, between concrete and intangible, and between real and metaphorical.

The final verse foregrounds sensory experience and Symbolist connections. Lines 21–22 not only evoke the senses of sight ("moon") and sound ("sonorous water"), but also the experiences of kinesis, frisson/temperature, and space ("trees shivering all around), as well as an emotional or spiritual sense ("blessed night"). Writing of Symbolist imagery, Louis Forestier explains that "one must discover the constellations they [the images] form and which compose, out of each varied figure, a vaster one that is closer to profound reality. This new poetic fact is essential if we are to understand Symbolism."[135] Indeed, at the close of "Le jet d'eau," the speaker demonstrates precisely this process. After listing the scene's various elements, the speaker distills their essence, asserting that "[their] pure melancholy / Is the mirror of [his] love" (23–24). Mirrors are a signature trope of Symbolism, for they "reveal the secret of a hidden

[133] A year after the poem appeared in the *La petite revue* (8 July 1865), it was included in Baudelaire's 1866 collection, *Épaves*. Two years later, it was republished in the 1868 version of *Les fleurs du mal*.
[134] The final stanza of Verlaine's "Clair de lune" (published in his *Fêtes galantes*, 1869) is particularly reminiscent of the imagery in "Le jet d'eau": "With the calm moonlight, sad and beautiful, / That sets the birds to dreaming in the trees / And [makes] the water jets sob with ecstasy" (Au calme clair de lune triste et beau, / Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres / Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau, lines 9–11).
[135] Louis Forestier, "Symbolist Imagery," trans. Edouard Roditi, in *The Symbolist Movement in the Literature of European Languages*, ed. Anna Balakian (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982), 117.

reality that would otherwise be invisible to the human eye."[136] In "Le jet d'eau," the mirror reveals a chiaroscuro likeness of the speaker's love, reflected in both beauty and eternal lament (17, 19).

Form and Image

The poem's idiosyncratic form alternates three octave stanzas with a sestet refrain. This construction, while not classical in itself, implies a sequence of Italian sonnets: 8 + 6, 8 + 6, 8 + 6 with an enchaining refrain. We may thus understand the refrain as formally integrated with the preceding stanza (as in the fourteen-line sonnet), while also experiencing it as the "other" of a binary stanza/refrain alternation. As we shall see, Debussy's setting will both underscore and undermine the poem's formal boundaries, allowing him to simultaneously suggest multiple, contradictory formal organizations.

Like the poem's form, its central image yields a double interpretation. On the one hand, the fountain stands as a symbol of the eternal that "falls silent neither day nor night" ("ne se tait ni nuit ni jour" [line 6]). On the other hand, the fountain's dynamism speaks to constant change, as droplets trace the fountain's arc of ascent and descent.[137] As Alison Fairlie explains, such dualities—in which "an idea or an image contains its opposite or gradually moves into that opposite"—"give Baudelaire's poetry its particular tone of both tension and fluidity."[138] Thus, the resonance of the fountain falling like "tears" (R6) simultaneously sustains ecstasy and alludes to its evanescence.

In stanzas 1 and 3, Baudelaire emphasizes the fountain's constancy. In stanza 1, the fountain is a concrete part of the speaker's world: hearing its unceasing "gossip" in the courtyard (line 5), the speaker says the sound "*prolongs* the ecstasy / Into which love plunged [him]" (lines

[136] Ibid.
[137] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 89.
[138] Alison Fairlie, *Baudelaire:* Les fleurs du mal (London: Edward Arnold, 1960), 14.

7–8, my emphasis). In stanza 3, the fountain is both real and figurative: the speaker metaphorically conflates the sound of the beloved's heartbeat with the sound of the fountain as he "listen[s] to the *eternal* lament / that sobs within the basins" (lines 19–20, my emphasis). Thus, in both its literal and figurative evocations, the fountain of the outer stanzas serves as a symbol of changelessness.

In contrast, the central stanza emphasizes the fountain's dynamism, narrating the arc traced through the opposing motions of ascent and descent. Quatrain 3 describes a soul's upward propulsion (it "springs toward the vast, enchanted skies" [line 12]), and quatrain 4 describes its subsequent cascade (it "descends to the depths" [line 16]). Baudelaire further dramatizes these opposing motions by connecting them to opposing elements. Passion begins as a lit firework rocketing toward the skies ("your soul that ignites / the burning flash of pleasure," lines 9–10), and ends as falling water ("Then it pours out, dying, / In a gush of sad languor" (lines 13–14). Changes to the fountain's interpretation thus create a ternary (ABA) structure: stasis → arc → stasis (refer to figure 3.7, below).

Figure 3.7. Formal structures in Baudelaire's "Le jet d'eau"

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Baudelaire</td><td colspan="2">Verse 1: static; connection between speaker/nature</td><td rowspan="2">Refrain: arc</td><td colspan="2">Verse 2: arc</td><td rowspan="2">Refrain: arc</td><td colspan="2">Verse 3: static; connection between speaker/nature</td><td rowspan="2">Refrain: arc</td></tr>
<tr><td>Q1</td><td>Q2</td><td>Q3: ascent</td><td>Q4: descent</td><td>Q5</td><td>Q6</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">new rhymes</td><td colspan="2">echoed rhymes</td><td>repeated refrain</td><td>new rhymes</td><td>echoed rhymes</td><td>repeated refrain</td></tr>
</table>

But the refrain, which also describes the fountain's arc, complicates the balanced form created by the three stanzas. Even the grammatical pacing of the refrain's single sentence mimics the fountain's energetic rise and fall. Baudelaire begins with the noun ("the spray of water," R1), but then introduces subordinate clauses that delay the verb until the fifth line ("falls," R5). The significant delay of the expected verb increases rhetorical intensity through the first four lines.

Then, when the grammatical expectation is met—and when the fountain's spray finally drops in R5—the sentence's rhetorical energy palpably abates. As we will see, Debussy's refrain melody emphasizes the interpolating delay, but thereafter increases musical intensity through the end of the refrain.

The poem's rhyme scheme also reflects the fountain's kinetic image. The new end-rhymes of quatrains 3 and 5 embody centrifugal energy, while the recycled rhymes of quatrains 4 and 6 demonstrate centripetal force. (Refer to figure 3.6, above; reprised rhymes *a*, *f*, *g*, and *d* are indicated in bold.) Baudelaire's recycled rhymes also support semantic connections. For example, rhyme *d* connects the first and third stanzas, using sonic repetition to relate the ecstasy of love (lines 7–8) with the melancholy of love (lines 23–24). Rhyme *f* connects verse 2 back to the refrain, describing the soul's descent with the same sounds that previously described the fountain. In quatrain 6, the speaker's descriptions of mirrored reflection and sympathetic vibration are patterned with recycled rhymes, and the echoic return of these sounds serves as an enactment of this quatrain's thematic content.

In "Le jet d'eau" the poem's form and central image allow deliberately ambiguous interpretations that first create boundaries, then work to undermine them. The fountain's motions of ascent and descent are mirrored in the contrast of stanza (longer line-lengths, new content) with refrain (shorter line lengths, repetition of previous content). However, cutting across this binary delineation, the recycled rhyme scheme intermixes verse and refrain elements. The speaker's frequent changes of attention and style help sustain the precarious balance of stillness and motion, ecstasy and melancholy. At the poem's close, Symbolist mirroring indirectly reveals the equivocal nature of the speaker's love.

Debussy's Setting of Baudelaire's "Le jet d'eau"

Debussy's setting of "Le jet d'eau" evokes a series of artistic tensions. Stylistically, his approach to the work blends popular and avant-garde aesthetics. On the one hand, as Helen Abbott argues, the composer's decision to set Baudelaire's refrain variant, with its "more direct," less Symbolist language, shifts the lyrics toward a more popular style.[139] On the other hand, as several scholars note, the music for "Le jet d'eau" marks Debussy's move away from traditional influences.[140] Structurally, the music for "Le jet d'eau" appears to echo the poem's formal design in its large-scale tripartite division, its articulation of verses (octets) and refrain (sestet), and even the sectioning of each octet into quatrains. But the music uses arch-symmetrical patterning more dramatically than the poem, and Debussy enhances those effects through increasingly porous formal boundaries.

As we shall see, Debussy begins by creating highly differentiated musical agencies that interact within the song's pastoral mode. As the setting unfolds, it simultaneously evokes the teleology of eroding formal boundaries and the timeless stasis of arch form. The close of the work brings Debussy's contrasting agencies into close association, as layered thematic elements evoke correspondence between opposing realms. Throughout the setting, Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion is at play. By "suggestion," I mean not only subtlety—although that may certainly be an aspect—but more importantly the evocation of multiple possible musical realities, whether fulfilled or denied. The music's temporal stance is first variable, then, eventually, troped into an

[139] Helen Abbott, "Baudelaire's 'Le Jet d'eau' and the Politics of Performance," *Dix-Neuf* 17, no. 1 (April 2013): 42–43. Abbot explains that the poem may itself stem from a blending of high art and popular styles. Although the poem's origins are not clear, Baudelaire may have written "Le jet d'eau" to fit a preexisting piece of music by "salon composer" Victor Robillard, or he may have written the poem "in collaboration with the popular *chansonnier* Pierre Dupont" (39).

[140] For example, Jarocinski argues broadly that "it is only in *Le jet d'eau* that Debussy succeeds in freeing himself completely from outside influences" (*Debussy*, 125–26). Along similar lines, Parks notes that "Le jet d'eau" and "Recueillement" articulate "a break with the early, wholly diatonic-tonal songs" (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 91).

emergent temporality. Debussy's song thus achieves a rarified expression that is even more Symbolist than Baudelaire's poem.

Expressive Genre and Topic

Like the other songs in this chapter, Debussy's setting of "Le jet d'eau" evokes the pastoral mode. The song is grounded by C major[141] and its tempo markings are slow. Performance indications for both piano (*très doux*) and voice (*languide*) underscore the setting's gentle quality. The triple meter[142] of "Le jet d'eau" replicates no specific dance, but the two-bar hypermeter (an ersatz 6/4) could suggest a slow berceuse. This topic is easily at home with the poem's evening setting, the repetitive motions of the fountain, and the quasi-lullaby text of its opening lines ("Your beautiful eyes are tired, poor lover! / Remain for a long time, without opening them" [1–2]). Indeed, Baudelaire's refrain text names this topic explicitly: "La gerbe d'eau qui *berce* / Ses mille fleurs" (R1–2, my emphasis). In Debussy's setting, the first and most important melodic motive provides intertextual support for the berceuse topic by repeatedly recalling the vocal refrain of Debussy's earlier "Rondeau,"[143] a song that makes clear use of the berceuse. His setting of the refrain also reinforces the berceuse topic with simple dominant-tonic harmonic oscillations and a slightly faster tempo that facilitates hypermetrical grouping.

[141] Harmonically, the beginning of "Le jet d'eau" shows a resemblance to "La cathédrale engloutie." Debussy designs the beginnings of both "watery" works to coalesce toward C, with a tonic arrival given belatedly (m. 10 in "Le jet d'eau"; m. 14 in "La cathédrale engloutie") rather than clearly established at the very opening. In "Le jet d'eau," although C-centricity is implied by the key signature and potentially reinforced by the oscillating C–D dyad, the song begins with a feint to G minor. The passage immediately undercuts this tonicization, first with a deceptive move to E minor (m. 3), then by repeating and layering this feint over a subposed C–G fifth (m. 5). (The low fifth gives harmonic context to the opening dyad and C-major vocal arpeggio (mm. 3–5), a belated claim for C-centricity. But in bars 6–7, the progression starts again from g minor and descends by semitone. This ersatz lament bass ends on E major as if on a Phrygian half cadence in A minor. Recollecting tonal bearings, E's resolution to A minor in m. 8 inaugurates an accelerating circle-of-fifths sequence (E–a–d–G–C) that closes the quatrain with a perfect authentic cadence in tonic.

[142] The piano is marked with a double time signature, 9/8 and 3/4.

[143] Derived from the first four pitches of the vocal line (G–F♯–D–E), this enfolding gesture recreates the opening line of Debussy's "Rondeau" (F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯; "Fut-il jamais"). The lines are intervallically identical and show analogous rhythmic and metric treatments.

Complicating the Berceuse

Over the course of the song, Debussy inflects the lulling berceuse with complicating textural and harmonic features. He introduces topical figurations that convey human emotion and depict natural elements. The song's harmonic progressions sometimes confirm traditional tonality, thus providing a backdrop against which the listener can experience tonal disorientation and temporally interrupted syntax, in addition to chromatic-mediant motions and non-functional harmonic oscillations, as will be discussed below.

At the beginning of "Le jet d'eau," the piano plays Debussy's "signature" C–D dyad[144] in syncopated-triplet octave oscillations. Slowly oscillating dyads pervade the entire first verse, although in the second quatrain they are transposed away from the C–D origin and the syncopation is temporarily smoothed into even triplets. As seen in the discussion of Debussy's 1882 setting of "En sourdine," the composer often uses similar oscillating figures in association with water and melancholia. Debussy's use of the oscillating figure in his setting of "Le jet d'eau" thus underscores Baudelaire's poetic imagery, evoking both the water in the fountain and the melancholic nature of the speaker's love.

In the refrain, Debussy introduces quick tuplets (quintuplets in m. 22, accelerating to sextuplets from m. 30). This arabesque figuration is associated with wind and dancing in Debussy's music. For example, tuplets pervade "Le vent dans la plaine" (*Préludes*, Book 1, No. 3).[145] "Harmonie du soir" uses the fast sextuplet for the accompaniment to the line "melancholy

[144] The "signature dyad" is important in Debussy's "Feux d'artifice," which David Lewin notes in *Musical Form and Transformation: Four Analytic Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), PDF e-book 115. Although Baudelaire's imagery evokes fireworks in quatrain 3 of "Le jet d'eau," Debussy's setting of that quatrain uses oscillating dyads only in its final measure (m. 42).

[145] Siglind Bruhn calls the sextuplets in this prelude its "regular breeze." *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: The Extra-Musical Subtext in Piano Works by Ravel, Debussy, and Messiaen* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1997), 64.

waltz and languorous vertigo."[146] Quick tuplets are also important in "Ce qu'a vu le vent d' Ouest" and "La danse de Puck" (*Préludes*, Bk. 1, Nos. 7 and No. 11). Thus, in Debussy's setting, the mixture of melancholic and effervescent figurations (the oscillating dyads and quick tuplets, respectively) is consistent with the poem, whose chiaroscuro descriptions of "eternal lament" (19) and "pure melancholy" (23) are interwoven with reflections on beauty and ecstasy.

Tonal Disorientation and Indeterminacy

Debussy's harmonic approach fluctuates. As mentioned above, he first establishes functional tonality and then introduces chromatic-mediant progressions and non-progressive harmonic oscillations. As we will see, he also treats functional tonality to distorting effects, suggesting multiple, simultaneous tonal centers, and temporally fracturing functional progressions. The harmonic design of the first verse-refrain pair exemplifies these strategies. The setting of quatrain 1 closes apparently functionally, with a descending-fifths sequence that cadences on C major (m. 10). Directly following, the first phrase of quatrain 2 establishes an E♭-major plateau (mm. 12–14) that concludes with a tonally disorienting shift (m. 15). That is, in bar 14 the vocal line arpeggiates through the E♭-major triad before sliding downward from G to F♯ at the close. This chromatic slip sounds, enharmonically, like a turn to E♭ minor. At the same time, the piano moves by descending fifth to close with a nominal "half cadence" on G♯^{7} (mm. 14–15, enharmonically V/V–V^7 in C♯). Debussy thus simultaneously suggests both E♭ and C♯ as local

[146] "valse mélancholique et langoureux vertige."

centers.[147] Yet neither of these tonal implications is realized immediately: the chordal seventh (F♯) remains as a common tone and the new phrase begins on B (a chromatic-mediant chordal relationship).

In bars 20–21 Debussy inserts a musical bridge—simultaneously an interruption and a musical continuation—between the end of the first verse and the beginning of the first refrain. Rather than resolving the previous G^{11} "half-cadence" (m. 19), Debussy moves to $C♯^{9}$, a tritone substitute. As the piano introduces this uncanny continuation, it also switches momentarily into 6/8, allegorically the alter-ego of the song's 3/4 time signature, just as $C♯^{9}$ is a substitute for G^{11}. The C♯ harmony may also suggest a kind of syntactic "interlock" in the sense described by Edward T. Cone.[148] Although the $G♯^{7}$ of bar 15 did not then resolve as a dominant-function chord, here—finally—is the deferred C♯. With this functionally tonal connection working only "at a distance," the passage may suggest a simple (pastoral) temporal experience that is first fractured, then spliced.[149]

At the start of the refrain, Debussy returns the music to its tonal and metric normalcy by reinstating both G^{7} (now with a sharp fifth) and 3/4.[150] This time, the dominant resolves

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[147] Debussy uses a similar strategy with the $G♯^{7}$ half cadence of m. 72. The $G♯^{7}$'s chordal structure, immediate context, and the allusions it makes to previous material within "Le jet d'eau" each suggest a different possible key center. As a simple dominant, it points toward C♯. In the context of this quatrain (quatrain 5), which began with E minor, it is also possible to interpret the last two chords as the Neapolitan in E minor (with added 7th) moving to $G♯^{7}$ as a dominant-function substitute for B. The progression from F to G♯ is also part of the Phrygian half cadence to E (and, indeed, the vocal outline of mm. 71–72 might suggest A as a tonic). Debussy has made similar moves earlier in the song: first in bars 6–7, where F minor moves to E^{6} (the G♯ is extruded as a lower bass note); and again in the middle of the refrain, where F minor moves to E major as the voice sings F–G♯.

[148] "Stravinsky: The Progress of a Method," *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (Autumn, 1962): 19. This kind of interconnection occurs when the listener abstractly recreates the seamlessness of a temporality received in disjunct slices. Citing the similar techniques and era of origin shared by "stratified musical form" and "cinematic montage," Mark McFarland argues that "Debussy was actually the first composer to employ this formal scheme in his works." "Debussy: The Origins of a Method," *Journal of Music Theory* 48, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 304, 307.

[149] In his application of Cone's theory to an analysis of two of Debussy's piano preludes, McFarland focuses on stratification through contrasting motives, textures, and pitch collections, and includes dominant resolution as a means of synthesis ("Origins of a Method," 310, 314).

[150] The appearance of the whole-tone dominant is "striking" (Parks, *Music of Claude Debussy*, 102), and helps differentiate verse from refrain.

according to tonal expectation, with C arriving in bar 23. This tonic carries a chordal seventh, suggesting that it could function as an applied dominant to IV, but Debussy simply repeats the G^7–C^7 oscillation in measures 24–25, emphasizing the berceuse topic and forestalling forward motion.

Pastoral Undercutting, Sublimity, and Dramatic Inversion

In his setting of "Le jet d'eau," Debussy's sometimes counterintuitive dynamics participate in pastoral undercutting[151] while other parameters simultaneously intensify the climactic moment. Rather than victorious apotheosis, the composer thereby imbues these events with a sense of elusive wonder that renders the pastoral mode temporarily sublime. For example, when Debussy sets the poem's second exclamation point,[152] the tessitura and range bespeak obvious significance. The piano tessitura in bars 69–72 is the highest of the piece, and at the cadence (mm. 71–72) the piano's five-octave span creates the song's widest simultaneity. But the tempo slows (ritardando, m. 71), and the dynamics are "molto pp" and "più pp" (mm. 71–72). Similarly, Debussy gives the highest vocal note of the piece to the phrase "blessed night," but indicates a crescendo to (subito) pianissimo (mm. 75–76).[153]

In verse 2 Debussy's use of tempo rubato participates in another type of Symbolist indirection.[154] For example, in quatrain 3, Debussy's tempo marking ("Meno mosso tempo rubato," m. 35) seems counterintuitive for the poetic text, which describes motion both "rapid" and "daring" (line 11). Debussy conveys the heightened energy of the text not through an expected increase in tempo, but through rubato, that force which counters the status quo. In

[151] As we have seen, Hatten considers "undercutting of expressive climaxes" to be one of the "fundamental principle[s] of pastoral expression in music: mollified tension and intensity." *Interpreting Musical Gestures*, 56.
[152] "To listen to the eternal lament / That sobs within the basins!" (lines 19–20).
[153] Jarocinski comments on yet another instance—the close of the work—whose "dynamic development is the opposite of Romantic rhetoric: the intensity of the sound, instead of increasing, descends from *pp* to *ppp*." *Debussy*, 127.
[154] Symbolist methodology avoids direct expression, and instead evokes ideas "through the use of unexplained symbols." Charles Chadwick, *Symbolism* (London: Methuen, 1971), 2–3.

quatrain 4, Debussy's tempo marking ("a tempo [Andantino tranquillo]," m. 42) represents a return to an overall faster, if steadier, tempo. This again seems counterintuitive for the text, which speaks of "dying" and "sad languor" (lines 13–14). Yet, the previous quatrain's rubato exerted energy against the regular musical flow; without that energetic rubato, Debussy's faster tempo actually sounds less dynamic. In the poem, verse 2 describes an obvious arc: ascent in quatrain 3 is followed by descent in quatrain 4. But in Debussy's more Symbolist vision, the countering of performance stereotypes allows the setting to render the poetic arc indirectly, as if in an inverted reflection.

Contrast between Verse and Refrain

Debussy begins "Le jet d'eau" by making a significant musical contrast between verse and refrain. We have already seen that the quick tuplets of the refrain counter the slower oscillating dyads of the first verse. But Debussy also differentiates verse and refrain through contrasting approaches to melodic design, pacing of text, grouping between parts, motivic development, and tempo. Whereas the verses demonstrate a more complex and conscious agency that reacts, forgets, remembers, and changes, the refrains demonstrate a simpler agency that gains momentum by moving according to established patterns. Where the verses repeatedly allow temporal immediacy to expand the present moment, the refrains' evocation of (past) tradition expresses a kind of temporal distance.

Verse: Temporal Immediacy, Multiple Agencies

Although the vocal setting of "Le jet d'eau" is consistently syllabic,[155] Debussy's melodic style varies significantly between verse and refrain. The vocal melody of the verses

[155] With only two exceptions, the vocal melody is entirely syllabic. The first exception is the two-note neume, expansive in this context, on the first syllable of "larges" in the refrains (mm. 32, 61, 93). The second exception, also a two-note neume, enacts "flot" in m. 45. These instances are remarked by Becker as examples of Debussy's text painting. "Debussy et son goût," *Relief* 6 (2012): 149.

intermixes large leaps with scalar motion, and uses little exact repetition in either pitch contour or rhythm.[156] This dramatic and improvisatory line creates a sense of immediacy in the subjective experience. The pacing of the text similarly emphasizes immediacy: while he typically sets Baudelaire's eight-syllable verse lines with two-bar subphrases, Debussy frequently breaks this pattern for expressive effect. The three most expanded and fractured lines are the first lines of quatrains 1 (mm. 2–5), 5 (mm. 64–66),[157] and 6 (mm. 74–76).[158] Besides being "first" lines, all of these lines (poetic lines 1, 17, and 21) are instances of direct address in the present moment, rather than reflection or description of past events. Thus, in "Le jet d'eau" the sense of time—as expressed through the expansion of Debussy's prototypical vocal subphrase—slows in the experience of the present moment.

Frequent grouping dissonances and motivic interplay between voice and piano suggest the simultaneous presence of multiple agencies or levels of consciousness. Temporary displacement dissonances between voice and piano arise in each verse, but the most significant of these occur in quatrains 4 and 6. Throughout quatrain 4 (mm. 43ff.), displacement dissonance is pervasive and consistent: the two-bar groupings in the vocal and piano parts are offset by a measure for the entire passage. This dissonance gives expression to the quatrain's poetic references to "dying" and "languor" (lines 13–14), as if the agency of the vocal line cannot keep

[156] Elliott Antokoletz refers to a "free vocal style (*parlando rubato*), [which plays] a particularly important role in the quasi-recitative vocal style of both the Debussy and Bartók operas." Antokoletz, with the collaboration of Juana Canabal Antokoletz, *Musical Symbolism in the Operas of Debussy and Bartók: Trauma, Gender, and the Unfolding of the Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

[157] In this case, Debussy's vocal melody for quatrain 5's *second* poetic line starts with the same G–B gesture (anacrusis to m. 67) as the quatrain's first poetic line, and thus serves as a normative two-bar prototype after the fact. William Rothstein defines a prototype as "the specific portion of the basic phrase that is subject to transformation" and further explains that "the basic phrase (or a phrase very similar to it) is given just prior to its expanded counterpart, or it may be stated elsewhere in the composition." *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 64, 92.

[158] Bourion's analysis of mm. 73–77 reveals that where the number of (sung) syllables demarcated by each of Baudelaire's punctuation marks is *increasing* ("Lune" [2 sung syllables], "eau sonore" [4], "nuit bénie" [4], / "Arbres qui frissonnez autour," [8]), the length of Debussy's repeated blocks is *decreasing*. *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 144–45. Thus, while Baudelaire's language begins to coalesce into longer-breathed utterances, Debussy fragments the surface more minutely.

pace with that of the piano part. In quatrain 6, such dissonance is both pervasive and constantly changing. Debussy again creates displacement dissonance between the voice and piano, and also—at times—implies grouping dissonance between the right and left hands (note right-hand/left-hand disagreement in mm. 76–78). These chaotic relationships offer a musical analog of the expanding scope and multiplied cast of quatrain 6, where the speaker turns his attention outward toward the various characters of nature.

Verse: Memory, Influence, and Strategies of the Obscured

Because motives are passed between voice and piano, they evoke the functions of memory and influence. In verse 1, the repetitions in the piano restate vocal content, thereby acting as a "speaking melody" or memory.[159] But in verse 2, the piano part clearly prefigures the appearance of the motive in the voice, as if influencing the actions of the voice. Additionally, in quatrains 1 and 6 Debussy's motivic design contributes to his rhetoric of suggestion as a strategy of the partial and obscured. While motivic variations are sometimes easily recognizable, at other times they are changed almost past the point of recognition.

The song's most important motive derives from the first four notes of the vocal line (G–F♯–D–E), an enfolding gesture that closely recalls the opening vocal melody of "Rondeau" (F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯).[160] In its first appearance, this "enfolding" motive is simultaneously amplified by the piano, which doubles the vocal line and provides a harmonization in parallel sixths (B♭–A–F♯–G). Presented, recalled, or approximated in every other measure of the first quatrain, the "enfolding" motive saturates the passage like a tiled mosaic.

Although the motive begins with a clear connection to the poetic text, this bond erodes over the course of the quatrain. The piano restates the motive in mm. 4–5, a "speaking melody"

[159] This is similar to Debussy's motivic design in "Rondeau." See also Kramer, "Speaking Melody," 127.
[160] Besides being intervallically identical, the lines show analogous rhythmic and metric treatments.

that clearly recalls the song's opening words. In m. 6 the motive and its harmonization are inverted—the voice begins on B♭, and the piano starts on the motive's original G. Then, after only two notes, the contour is broken: the piano extends the motive's half-step descent, creating a lament bass that moves to a half cadence in m. 7. As this stock pattern overwhelms the original motive, the variation is left incomplete. In m. 8, the piano presents a C-diatonic version of the motive (B–A–E–F) that underscores elements of the simultaneous vocal part (B–A–E–D–E). The motivic design of this passage reflects Debussy's strategy of the partial and the obscured. As new words are layered in by the voice and the motive itself is so altered as to be nearly unrecognizable, its "speaking melody" falls below the level of consciousness. Absorbed into the background fabric, the motive evokes only a vague sense of echo or familiarity.[161]

In the second verse, Debussy's motivic design strongly suggests that the piano takes on the role of subconscious influence. The piano initiates the motive in the second subphrase where its soprano melody twice traces G–F♯–E–F♯ (mm. 37, 38). At the start of the second phrase, the motive is transposed to B–A–G–A (m. 39, 40). It is here that the vocal part picks up the motive, doubling it at the octave. The motive's first words in the voice are "S'élance, rapide et hardie, Vers les . . ." ("Springs, rapid and daring, Toward the . . ."). The motive was hinted earlier in the piano (the "burning flash" in m. 37) but only now bursts through the texture to unite with the voice. This passage is charged with energy, not simply because the voice takes on the shorter

[161] As in quatrain 1, Debussy patterns quatrain 5 with a regularly repeated motive—but this time it is clearly articulated by the vocal melody. At the beginning of each poetic line, the voice inscribes an ascending third (G–B in mm. 64 and into 67, A–C into m. 69, and A–C♯ into m. 71). The motivic design of the vocal line creates a musical alliteration of beginnings, thereby highlighting the first words of each poetic line: "O toi," "Qu'il m'est doux," "D'écouter," and "Qui sanglo[te]." An extra repetition of this gesture in the vocal anacrusis to bar 72 gives a beginning gesture to a phrase ending, suggesting a never-ending loop, a musical enactment of "la plainte éternelle" to which this poetic line refers. Another motivic fragment derives from the vocal line as it traces the melodic apex of the first poetic line (E–F♯–C♯, mm. 65–66). This fragment is repeated in the piano at the beginning of the next couplet (mm. 68–69) and again in 69–70, where it appears simultaneously in the voice. The second couplet begins with "D'écouter" (m. 68), and Debussy's motivic design ensures that we do listen: the piano's unmistakable anticipatory repetition marks the poetic rhyme for even greater attention when we hear the motive returned to the voice.

one-bar patterning of the piano, but because the passage suggests an influential connection between piano and voice. As the musical agents appear to exchange messages or ideas, they more closely approximate human agency and communication. Debussy drops the motive at the climactic close of quatrain 3 ("vast, enchanted skies," mm. 41–42). But he returns it to the piano part of quatrain 4, where it acts as a regulating pattern and subconscious memory of quatrain 3 (first, D♯–C♯–B–C♯ in mm. 43, 45; then as an ostinato on C–B♭–A♭–B♭, mm. 46–49).

Verse: Evoking Strophic Variations

While the verse settings are largely through composed, Debussy also creates subtle resemblances between the verses, as though they might be a set of strophic variations.[162] For example, like quatrain 1, quatrain 3 is grounded by C. But unlike quatrain 1, this centricity is not achieved through tonal norms: the low C reiterated on the first four downbeats (mm. 35–38) is harmonized first by c^7 (decorated with a neighbor $B♭^{M7}$) and then by C^9 (extended by oscillation to tritone-related $F♯^9$). Then, instead of closing the quatrain with a stabilizing cadence to C—as in quatrain 1—the final cadence of this passage reflects the "enchantment" of its poetry (line 12). Quatrain 3 ends on a "half-cadence" comprised of B^7 over E: the E♭ that began the passage as an inert part of the c^7 harmony has become enharmonically charged as the leading-tone D♯.

There are also similarities between quatrains 2 and 4, and between quatrains 4 and 6. As in quatrain 2 (m. 15), Debussy uses harmonic and melodic cues to destabilize tonal clarity at the first cadence of quatrain 4. The harmony of quatrain 4 begins on E, but slips to E♭ to set the text "sad languor" (m. 46). In this bar, the vocal line (E♭–D♭–E♭–F♭–F) is also briefly coherent with the previous E-centered music (enharmonically, $\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{1}$–♭$\hat{2}$ in E). Thus, in addition to sadness, the ambiguity of this vocal line approximates the sense of a temporary disorientation or swoon.

[162] This is similar to Debussy's approach in "Rondeau."

The profile of the quatrain 4's second phrase (mm. 47–50) is reminiscent of both phrases in quatrain 2: ascending stepwise motion, followed by the leap of a fourth and then descent. The accompaniment in m. 76 (quatrain 6) strongly recalls quatrain 4, albeit briefly; note the same E–B pedal oscillation and triplet arpeggios in mm. 43–49.

Refrain: Fixity, Periodicity, Simplicity, Increased Kinesis

Closer in style to popular or folk song, the refrains contrast to the verses in several respects. Whereas similarities between the vocal melodies of the three verses are subtle and partial, Debussy treats the poetic refrain as a musical refrain, and its vocal melody recurs essentially unchanged in both subsequent refrains. Unlike the more improvisatory verse melody, the refrain melody is obviously patterned. The refrain melody becomes "instrumental," in the sense that it is built of repeating blocks, as the piano part so often is.[163] In the verses, the pacing of text occasionally expands the present moment with a sense of immediacy, whereas the motivic designs evoke the processes of forgetting and remembering. In contrast, the refrains' unchanging repetitions express a kind of atemporality or distance. The refrain settings use no phrase expansions (which occur often in the verses) and they maintain grouping synchrony between voice and piano (while in the verses, there is frequent displacement and grouping dissonance). These regularities simplify the refrain's agency, collapsing the conscious/subconscious duality evoked by motivic interplay between voice and piano in the verses. With its faster tempo and

[163] For example, mm. 2–5, 16–21, 35–40, and 42–49. At the start of the refrain, the vocal line's motivic repetition renders the poetic enjambment inaudible (e.g., mm. 22–25). Whereas Baudelaire's poem exposes "berce," "traverse," and "averse" as end-rhymes, in Debussy's setting, "berce" is buried mid-phrase as the music suggests the following, more grammatically conformant line breaks:

Baudelaire:	*Debussy:*
La gerbe d'eau qui berce	La gerbe d'eau
Ses mille fleurs,	Qui berce Ses mille fleurs

quick tuplets,[164] the music of the refrain is also more kinetic than the verses, a difference that reflects the poem's rhythms without mimicking its mechanics.[165] The refrains' evocation of glibly paced folk song suggests a distillation of the past into rote tradition.

Verse/Refrain Boundaries Eroded: Motivic Design, Figuration

Despite his initial differentiation of verse from refrain, Debussy's setting soon begins to erode these musical boundaries. Like the robust motivic patterns of the refrain, and unlike the "enfolding" motive of the first verse, the new motive of verse 2 remains easily recognizable. It also persists through both quatrains (3 and 4), rather than dying out at the end of the first. The piano figuration also begins to undermine the boundaries between verse and refrain. In verse 1, Debussy uses the oscillating dyad as a marker of the verse and the quick tuplet as a marker of the refrain. In subsequent verses, the figuration works differently: the first quatrains of verses 2 and 3 contain "new" rhymes and are set with quick tuplets; the second quatrains contain recycled rhymes and are set with slower figuration (see figure 3.8 below). In verse 2, the quick tuplets are associated with the energy of the fountain's climb, while the slower figuration reflects the lassitude of its fall. By contrasting the quatrains within verses 2 and 3, Debussy creates a musical analogue to Baudelaire's centrifugal/centripetal rhyme scheme. But the links between the refrain and *subsequent* quatrain are unique to Debussy's conception: his accompanimental figures create an alternate design that consistently cuts across verse/refrain boundaries.

[164] The signature dyads, back again on C–D, return only momentarily in these two refrains, punctuating the ends of the first two musical subphrases (mm. 23 and 25, 52 and 54).

[165] Baudelaire uses shorter line lengths in the refrain than he does in the verses (six- and four-syllable lines vs. eight-syllable lines, respectively). Although Debussy homogenizes these contrasting poetic line lengths by setting the refrain's shorter lines with the same two-measure subphrases he uses for the verse's longer lines, he uses other musical parameters to increase the pace of the refrain.

Figure 3.8. Form and figuration patterns in Debussy's "Le jet d'eau"

Verse 1	Refrain	Verse 2		Refrain	Verse 3		Refrain
Q1 + Q2: dyads	R1 + Q3: quick tuplets		Q4: dyads, triplets	R2 + Q5: quick tuplets		Q6 + R3: diminutional ritard	

Arch-Symmetrical Relationships

Over the course of the song, "strophic" resemblances are increasingly inflected by quasi-arch-form patterning. This first occurs at the level of the phrase: the *last phrase* of quatrain 4 recalls the *first phrase* of quatrain 2. In quatrain 2, the vocal cadences are to F♯ on "jour" (m. 15) and F♮ on "amour" (m. 19). In quatrain 4, the cadences are to F♮ or D♭ on "langueur" (m. 46)[166] and to F♯ on "coeur" (m. 50). In the first phrase of quatrain 2, the essential motion is from E♭ (mm. 12–14) to G♯^{7} (m. 15). This basic motion repeats in the *last* half of the fourth quatrain, where E♭ (mm. 46–47) moves to A♭^{7} (m. 48–49).

In verse 3, Debussy explores similar arch-form patterning, expanding its influence to the level of the quatrain and then the level of the verse. At the level of the quatrain, the *first* quatrain of verse 3 (Q5) recalls the *last* quatrain of verse 2 (Q4). Unlike quatrains 1 and 3, quatrain 5 does not recall C-centricity. Instead, like quatrain 4, quatrain 5 starts on E. This connection relates a *beginning* quatrain (Q5) to an *ending* quatrain (Q4). Similarly, at the first cadence of quatrain 5, the leading-tone A♯ of the vocal line slides down to A♮. The downward semitone motion at the vocal cadence recalls similar moments in the *ending* quatrains of verse 1 (Q2, mm. 14–15) and verse 2 (Q4, mm. 45–46).

[166] Briscoe's score, which uses the 1902 Durand et Fils edition as the set's "basic published source" (*Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, 24), shows the D♭ cadence in m. 46 as urtext, but includes F♮ in small notes. Briscoe explains that "in mm. 46–49, the vocal line of [the autograph manuscript] is printed as the upper notes here, representing Debussy's first inspiration that certain singers might find still valid." *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, 26n6.

At the higher formal level, Debussy's setting creates several arch-symmetrical relationships between verses 1 and 3 (see figure 3.9, below). The first cue is subtle: the second cadence of verse 3 (G♯^{7}, m. 72) recalls the third cadence of verse 1 (G♯^{7}, m. 15). This repeated cadential chord supports repeated poetic content that describes the unceasing sound of the water: "In the courtyard the fountain that gossips / And doesn't quiet itself either night nor day" (lines 5–6) and "To listen to the eternal lament / That sobs within the basins!" (lines 19–20). The second cues are more obvious and more sustained: the "enfolding" motive from the beginning of verse 1 also patterns the second half of verse 3.[167] Similarly, the harmonic design of quatrain 6 (F♯?–B–E–A–D) mimics and prolongs the harmonic sequence that closed quatrain 1 (E–A–D–G–C, in measures 7–10).[168] Thus, anticipated by Debussy's small-scale arch-symmetrical returns, his large-scale returns musically instantiate Baudelaire's thematic arch, which begins and ends with the focus on the eternal fountain (verses 1 and 3).

Porous Boundaries, Arch-Form Symmetry, and Symbolist Integration

At the close of the song, Debussy's erosion of formal boundaries supports his increasing emphasis on arch-form symmetries. Whereas Baudelaire allows his final refrain to unbalance the poem's thematic arch (stasis–arc–arc–arc–stasis–arc), Debussy's figural, harmonic, and motivic designs work to restore symmetry by downplaying the boundary between verse 3 and refrain 3.

[167] In mm. 73–74, the left hand plays F♯–E♯–C♯–D♯, an exact recall of the "enfolding" motive, one half-step lower. As in quatrain 1, the vocal replications of the motive are subtle. In bars 76–77 the voice sings G♯–F♯–D–C♯, and this version is transposed to B–A–F♯–E in bar 78. Split across vocal subphrases, and with different rhythms and metrical placement than in the original motive, the intervals and contours are somewhat similar, as if half-remembered. But the piano reconstructs the vocal variant as a version of the "enfolding" motive, establishing it as an ostinato. In 79–82, the piano plays B–A–F♯ four times; the ostinato's metric placement and rhythmic profile now replicate that of the original "enfolding" motive, thereby encouraging recognition. Writing of this motive's transformation, Lori Seitz Rider argues that "the four-note motive, first heard while the speaker is still happy, is now fundamentally changed, replaced by the three-note version for the rest of the song, as the speaker's mood is permanently changed from pleasure to sadness." "'Lyrical Movements of the Soul': Poetry and Persona in the *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* and *Ariettes oubliées* of Claude Debussy," Ph.D. diss. (The Florida State University, 2002), 212.

[168] This authentic cadence (A^7–D) contrasts markedly with the half cadence (d^9–G^{11}) at the end of verse 1 and the chromatic-mediant "cadence" (A♭^{7}–E^9) at the end of verse 2.

These strategies allow the song to embody a ternary-derived form archetype in which developing variation is followed, eventually, by reprise.[169] But because Debussy retains the vocal refrain, the ternary archetype operates in addition to, or at odds with, the song's verse/refrain structure.

Figure 3.9. Music and poetry in "Le jet d'eau" [170]

<table>
<tr><td>mm.</td><td colspan="2">1</td><td>12</td><td colspan="2">20</td><td>35</td><td>43</td><td colspan="2">51</td><td>64</td><td colspan="2">73</td><td>83</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Debussy</td><td colspan="3">Q1 + Q2: dyads</td><td colspan="2">R1 + Q3: quick tuplets</td><td></td><td>Q4: dyads, triplets</td><td colspan="2">R2 + Q5: quick tuplets</td><td></td><td colspan="2">Q6 + R3: diminutional ritard</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>"enfold-ing" motive, ↓5ths</td><td>cad. 3: G♯7 (m 15)</td><td></td><td colspan="2"></td><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2"></td><td>cad. 2: G♯7 (m 72)</td><td colspan="2">"enfolding" motive, ↓5ths</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Verse 1</td><td colspan="2">Refrain</td><td colspan="2">Verse 2</td><td colspan="2">Refrain</td><td colspan="3">Verse 3</td><td>Refrain</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Baudelaire</td><td colspan="3">Verse 1: static; connection between speaker/nature</td><td colspan="2">Refrain: arc</td><td colspan="2">Verse 2: arc</td><td colspan="2">Refrain: arc</td><td colspan="3">Verse 3: static; connection between speaker/nature</td><td>Refrain: arc</td></tr>
<tr><td>Q1</td><td>Q2</td><td></td><td colspan="2"></td><td>Q3: ascent</td><td>Q4: descent</td><td colspan="2"></td><td>Q5</td><td colspan="2">Q6</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">new rhymes</td><td colspan="2">new</td><td>new</td><td>echoed</td><td>[refrain]</td><td colspan="2">new</td><td colspan="2">echoed</td><td>[refrain]</td></tr>
</table>

The final refrain's figural and harmonic design forges new connections between verse and refrain. Whereas earlier refrains are characterized by the quick tuplet, in quatrain 6 Debussy begins a diminutional ritard that extends into refrain 3. Beginning with the quick tuplets in quatrain 6, the figuration slows inconsistently, as though sputtering to a close. The final subdivisions in refrain 3 are not quick tuplets (compared to the sextuplets at the end of refrain 1 [mm. 32–33] and the quintuplets at the end of refrain 2 [62–63]), but eighth notes and then quarter notes. Harmonically, the descending-fifths sequence begun in quatrain 6 is continued into the refrain's first harmonic capsule ($G^{4/2[\text{with } \sharp 5]}$–$C^7$). This final verse-refrain boundary is the only

[169] Parks describes Debussy's use of this formal type in *Music of Claude Debussy* (221–22).

[170] At times, Debussy's transitions obscure his musical sections' exact beginnings or endings. On the chart, measure numbers are intended as guideposts rather than definitive sectional markers.

one that employs such traditional and directed root motion,[171] and its sense of re-stabilized tonality and harmonic continuity strengthens as the refrain proceeds.[172]

The final refrain incorporates the verses' most significant motive: the truncated "enfolding" ostinato (B–A–F♯) from the close of verse 3. This motive continues into the refrain; it is repeated on the off-beats of measures 83 and 85 and tonally inflected (B–A–F♮) to align with the G^7 harmony. The fragment returns, transposed, in the last phrase of the final refrain: D♯–C♯–A♯ in m. 93 becomes D–C–A in both 94 and 95 (here again, on the off-beats). Although the figuration does not emphasize the continuation to E, it is possible to construe the piano's tenor line in measures 93–94 as a complete version of the "enfolding" motive: G♯–F♯–D♯–E. The motive thus performs its "enfolding" function by appearing at the beginning and ending of the setting, simultaneously enhancing the perception of arch form.[173]

Debussy's integration of verse and refrain results in a layering of lyrics: the speaking melody of the piano echoes the hypnotic motive from "Tes beaux yeux sont las" at the same time that the voice sings "larges pleurs." These melodies are mirrors of one another. One melody originates in the immediacy of the verse, the other belongs to the quasi-atemporal refrain; yet they are functionally similar in that they are arguably among the most memorable melodic

[171] In comparison, the G^7 of m.19 is recaptured in m. 22 via the common-tone logic of tritone substitution ($C♯^9$); and the E^9 in m. 50 connects to the G^7 in m. 51 via the common-tone logic of chromatic-mediant relation.

[172] Although the vocal part remains unchanged, the harmonic accompaniment of the dependent clause ("Que la lune traverse / De se pâleurs") is quite different from the two previous refrain settings. As if bowing to the pressure of the extended descending-fifths sequence, the refrain's C^7 resolves for the first time according to the expectations of tonal practice (to F in m. 87). The D♭ in mm. 89–90 is interpretable as a Neapolitan, and these measures—unlike their counterparts in previous refrains—serve as a predominant interlude (rather than a dominant arrival or punctuation) inscribing C (rather than E or A) as the tonal center.

[173] The "Andantino tranquillo" marking of the final refrain forges yet another connection to the first verse, which the composer marked identically.

aspects of the entire song.[174] Further, since "eyes" express "tears," there is also an obvious imagistic relationship between the two poetic phrases. By layering the images of the woman's eyes and the fountain's water—implying a paradigmatic relationship between the two—Debussy thus enhances the symbolic sympathy between human and (external) natural worlds.[175]

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Le jet d'eau"

Working within the pastoral mode, Debussy complicates the berceuse with features that balance delight with dejection. Besides referencing the flowing elements of nature, his topical figurations tinge the berceuse with the human emotion of melancholy. The quick tuplets then serve to elevate the pastoral above the mundane, enriching simplicity with plenitude. Instead of triumphal arrival, however, Debussy uses pastoral undercutting and counterintuitive rubato to evoke a sublime and elusive sense of wonder. The first and last verses use strategies of effacement: repetitions of the "enfolding" motive are varied, partial, and obscured, as if barely recalled. Passages of tonal disorientation and the separation in time of syntactic threads enhance the sense of subtle indeterminacy.

The song's rhetoric of suggestion is also seen in the shifting associations between poetic image and musical form. Both media create and highlight oppositional pairs, including verse/refrain, ascent/descent, stasis/change, human/nature, slow/fast, immediate/distant, and traditional (or popular)/avant-garde. But both poet and composer also evoke multiple formal processes. For instance, Baudelaire establishes an opposition between verse and refrain, but his imagery also creates a quasi-arch-form logic. Both the poem and the musical setting employ a

[174] This final layering of the "enfolding" motive of the verse with the "larges pleures" motive of the refrain is reminiscent of another ternary-derived archetype described by Parks. In that archetype, A B (A+B), the final section "synthesizes characteristic features of the first two" (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 222–23). Again, "Le jet d'eau" combines and complicates this ternary archetype with the strophic logic of alternating verse and refrain.
[175] As Wenk explains the moment, "Debussy has sacrificed the independence of stanza and refrain to express Baudelaire's synthesis of all the elements of the poem into the self of the poet." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 91.

teleological design for the verses (the poetic verses contain the poem's narrative; Debussy's verse settings are largely through-composed), yet the verses also recall earlier materials (quatrains 4 and 6 recycle earlier end-rhymes; Debussy's verse settings show vestiges of strophic variation). Going beyond Baudelaire's poetic cues, Debussy's setting erodes the musical boundaries between verse and refrain and introduces increasingly dramatic evocations of arch form, a process that eventually results in a tropological blending of structural opposites.

The simultaneous and at times contradictory formal processes create a permeating atmosphere of contingency. For example, at the start of the song, the formal components of verse and refrain could be mapped onto the fountain's binary arc: the slower tempo and figuration of verse 1 might embody the languid energy of the fountain's descent, while the faster tempo and figuration of the refrain suggest its effervescent climb. Almost immediately this mapping is destabilized, since the figurations are no longer contained within the same verse/refrain boundaries. Baudelaire's roughly palindromic imagery suggests another interpretation: verses 1 and 3 reference the static or "eternal" fountain, but verse 2 (and the refrains) describe its dynamic arc.[176] Debussy's setting of verse 2 may be understood to text-paint the dynamic arc: he uses the quick tuplets at the start of verse 2 (as the poem describes the soul's ascent) and the slower dyads for the end of verse 2 (as the poem describes the soul's descent). Alternately, with regard to style and temporality, the verse settings (which are dramatic and varied) could depict the fountain's dynamism, while the refrain (whose more traditional melody recurs relatively unchanged) evokes the fountain's static persistence.

In yet another associative connection, the verses narrate human experience, and their musical agency is appropriately complex, evoking subconscious influence, communication, memory, and forgetting. In contrast, the refrain describes only the fountain, and its musical

[176] The final refrain interrupts the verses' simple thematic arch form.

agency is appropriately simpler and more kinetic, replicating its patterns almost mechanically. The final refrain thus presents a delicately poised double-vision of the fountain that simultaneously references both its dynamic arc and its static constancy. Here, the opposed temporalities and agencies of verse and refrain are momentarily blended, in that the layered poetic lines highlight a Symbolist mirroring between the human and natural worlds. Yet, because associations between image and form have been in constant flux over the course of the song, even this final trope is somewhat evanescent.

"Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau"

As we will see, the theme of "Le temps a laissié son manteau" is change, but the poem also emphasizes repetition through the rondel structure itself (rhyme and refrain), the imagistic oscillation of dress and undress, and the chorus of echoing voices. While the play between repetition and variation is a standard gambit of musical composition, Debussy's approach in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" is remarkable in his use of repetitive features—including refrains, strophic form, characteristic motives, and fixed elements—to effect change.

Charles d'Orléans and the Rondel Form

Charles d'Orléans is the accepted master of the rondel form,[177] and his "Le temps a laissié son manteau" is a classic example of the genre.[178] In the thirteenth century, the term *rondel* described the lyrics or music of "a dance or round."[179] In the fourteenth century, the definition was expanded to include a form of courtly poetry.[180] The rondel is closely related to

[177] John Fox explains that "after [the poet's] return to France, Charles neglected the ballade form and concentrated on the rondel, which to the end of his days remained his favourite type of poem and the one at which he excelled." *Lyric Poetry*, 116. Along similar lines, David A. Fein notes that the rondeau "captured and held [Charles's] fancy during the years following his release from England. Under his hand the rondeau was polished, if any poetic genre can be said to have been, to perfection." *Charles d'Orléans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 115.
[178] Fein states that "Le temps a laissié son manteau" is "by far the most famous of Charles's rondeaux, the best known of all his poems." *Charles d'Orléans*, 120.
[179] J. M. Cocking, "'Invention,'" 50.
[180] Ibid.

the *rondeau* (the terms are used interchangeably by some authors). Both poetic types are similar in length, consist of three strophes, use only two end-rhyme sounds, and feature a derived refrain—that is, the line(s) that begin the poem return to close stanzas 2 and 3.

Figure 3.10. Charles d'Orléans (1391–1465), "Le temps a laissié son manteau"[181]

1	**Le temps a laissié son manteau**	*A*	**The weather has left [also "shucked"] his coat**
2	**De vent, de froidure et de pluye,**	*B*	**Of wind, of cold, and of rain,**
3	Et s'est vestu de broderye,	*b*	And has dressed himself in embroidery
4	De soleil raiant [luyant] cler et beau.	*a*	Of radiant sun, clear and beautiful.
5	Il n'y a beste ne oiseau	*a*	There is neither beast nor bird
6	Qui en son jargon ne chante ou crye.	*b*	That in its language does not sing or shout.
7	**Le temps a laissié son manteau.**	*A*	**The weather has left his coat.**
~~*8*~~	~~**De vent, de froidure et de pluye.**~~	~~*B*~~	~~**Of wind, of cold, and of rain.**~~
9	Rivière, fontaine et ruisseau	*a*	River, fountain, and stream
10	Portent, en livrée jolye	*b*	Carry, as pretty livery,
11	Goultes d'argent d'orfaverie.	*b*	Drops of silver in goldsmiths' style.[182]
12	Chascun s'abille de nouveau,	*a*	Each dresses himself anew,
13	**Le temps a laissié son manteau.**	*A*	**The weather has left his coat.**

Although the rondel is typically described according to the formula *ABba, abAB, abbaA* (capital letters indicate lines repeated verbatim as the refrain),[183] in practice, formal expectations for the rondel vary within certain parameters.[184] For example, while most of Charles's rondels

[181] In the section "Debussy's Poetic Source" (below), I discuss Debussy's use of "raiant" instead of "luyant" in line 4 and the omission of refrain line 8.
[182] Alternately, "A goldsmith's silver drops."
[183] John Fox, "Introduction: Notes on Narrative and Verse Forms," in *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS. Fr. 25458, Charles d'Orléans's Personal Manuscript,* ed. John Fox and Mary-Jo Arn (Tempe: ACMRS, 2010), lv. Fox details the expected form of the *chançon*, which he explains is alternately titled *rondel*.
[184] According to Stephanie Kamath, "Charles also employed the *rondel* form with a longer opening stanza of five lines, found first in the poetry of Jean de Garencières and later widely adopted. Such significant changes in poetic forms over time, as well as variations in individual poetic practice, contribute to the growing dissatisfaction of modern scholars with the perhaps misleading late nineteenth-century term *formes fixes* for medieval lyric forms." "Introduction: Literary Context and Poetic Form," in *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS. Fr. 25458, Charles d'Orléans's Personal Manuscript,* ed. John Fox and Mary-Jo Arn (Tempe: ACMRS, 2010), xliii.

exhibit an octosyllabic line, there are also several exceptions.[185] The rondel uses one masculine and one feminine end-rhyme, but either one may begin the form.[186]

Formal expectation in the rondel is complicated not only by the number of acceptable variants, but also by copyists' abbreviations that make the extent of repeated material difficult to determine. Fein explains:

> One of the reasons why the rondeau cannot be neatly defined is the problem posed by a certain scribal convention called the *rentrement* ("re-entry"). As a means of economizing space the poem's refrain was routinely curtailed to its first few words followed by the abbreviation *etc.* This raises the question of how much of the opening stanza the poet intends to repeat—just the first verse, the first two verses, perhaps the whole stanza?[187]

In the introduction to his edition of D'Orléans, Jean-Claude Mühlethaler remarks, "We transcribe the *etc.* that follows the reprise of the refrain's first words without indicating—controversial detail!—whether the refrain should be repeated in its entirety or only in part."[188] As an example of the ambiguity occasioned by these abbreviations, Cocking notes that "'Le temps a laissié son manteau,' which has thirteen lines in all the nineteenth-century editions, and fourteen lines in Banville's first transcription, is printed by Champion with twelve only," but Cocking concludes that the poem "reads best with thirteen."[189] The most recent scholarly edition prints the poem with twelve lines.[190]

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[185] Fox, "Introduction," lvi.
[186] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. "Rondel."
[187] Fein, *Charles d'Orléans*, 116–17. Fein goes on to observe that Pierre Champion's edition (on which Cholakian's analyses are based) represents the editor's interpretive decisions as to how much of the refrain to repeat in each rondel: "Champion's interpretations vary. [. . .] Champion, exercising his prerogative as an editor, relies on a subjective reading of each poem in determining how to distribute the verses of the refrain. [. . .] The quantity of verses actually reread will vary from one reader to another" (117).
[188] "Nous transcrivons le *etc.* qui suit la reprise des premiers mots du refrain sans indiquer—détail controversé!—s'il faut reprendre le refrain en entire ou seulement en partie." Mühlethaler, *Charles d'Orléans: Ballades et rondeaux: Édition du manuscrit 25458 du fonds français de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992), 23.
[189] Cocking, "'Invention,'"55.
[190] Fox and Arn, *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans*, 444.

Fox remarks the particular effects of the rondel's truncated refrain pattern on the reader's participation, explaining that these effects enhance the salience of aurality and memory in the experience of the poetic form:

> "The rondel is a poem without an end. . . . The last line takes us back to the first, a circular pattern which can easily echo on in the imagination. . . . The natural tendency is therefore to supply this line [the second line of the opening couplet] in the middle or at the end of the poem when it is not actually expressed. In this way the reader becomes fully involved, and these little poems acquire a haunting effect."[191]

He argues that the scribal and editorial confusion regarding full or partial repetitions of the refrain stems from an intentional poetic ambiguity. Whereas earlier *chançons* (and some rondels) repeat the full refrain at the close of the second stanza, later rondels include only the first line. Despite this historical evolution of the rondel form,

> "the second line of the vast majority of the *rondels* continued to be end-stopped when there was no longer any need for this, so enabling these poems to be read . . . with a central refrain of either one or two lines. . . . The close attention to detail essential in the composition of such poems surely means that Charles cannot have been unaware of the obvious ambiguity in hundreds of them. They offer a choice. Well over 80% can be read with either a one-line central refrain, or two.[192]

Debussy's Poetic Source

According to Margaret G. Cobb, Debussy's textual source for "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" and "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" was the 1874 *Poésies complètes de Charles d'Orléans*, edited by Charles d'Héricault and published by Lemerre.[193] But Debussy's text for "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" does not match the d'Héricault/Lemerre version. Specifically, Debussy uses "raiant" (m. 8) where the 1874 edition uses "luyant" (line 4).[194] This difference probably does not stem from license on Debussy's part. Rather, it is likely

[191] Fox, *Lyric Poetry*, 122.
[192] Fox, "Introduction," lviii-lix.
[193] Cobb, *Poetic Debussy*, 153.
[194] Charles d'Héricault, ed., *Poésies complètes de Charles d'Orléans*, vol. 2 (Paris: Lemerre, 1874), 115.

that the composer referenced another edition, one based on a manuscript that preserves d'Orléans's original idea ("rayant") rather than his subsequent revision ("luyant").[195]

As to the ambiguous derived refrain, for his setting of "Le temps a laissié son manteau" Debussy uses one refrain line at the ends of stanzas 2 and 3. In contrast, for his setting of "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," he uses two refrain lines at the end of stanza 2, but only one refrain line at the end of stanza 3. This difference likely also reflects his text source rather than a personal choice.[196]

Both of the rondels Debussy chose to bookend his *Trois chansons de France* are concerned with weather ("le temps") and the significance of color and costume. Set in the spring of the year, both belong to the group of eighteen poems that Charles wrote concerning the month of May.[197] They are also emotional foils for one another. In "Le temps a laissié son manteau," the sun is out, the speaker does not participate in the action, and the colors are shining silver and gold. In "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," it's raining, the speaker is one of the poem's actors, and the color is black. As we have seen, Debussy's text does not precisely reflect d'Orléans's personal manuscript. But, interestingly, the composer's choice to pair these two poems echoes their position in the manuscript: "Le temps a laissié son manteau" appears first, on the lower half

[195] As Pierre Champion explains, Charles's personal manuscript copy (Paris, MS. Fr. 25458), shows a corrected version of the rondel, where the poet wrote "luyant" over the original "rayant." *Le manuscript autographe des poesies de Charles d'Orléans* (Paris: H. Champion, 1907), 6. However, not every modern edition was based on the poet's personal manuscript. For example, "raiant"—the original, 'uncorrected' version—appears in Aimé Champollion-Figeac's 1842 edition, *Les Poésies du duc Charles d'Orléans publiées sur le manuscript original de la Bibliothèque de Grenoble conféré avec ceux de Paris et de Londres* (Paris: J. Belin-Leprieur and C. de Batines, 1842), 136; and in Vincent Chalvet's 1802 edition, *Poésies de Charles d'Orléans, père de Louis XII et oncle de François Ier, rois de France* (Grenoble: Giroud, 1803), 257. Both editions were based on a manuscript held at the Grenoble library.

[196] With regard to these refrains, Debussy's versions again match the Champollion-Figeac edition exactly. *Poésies du duc*, 137 ("Le temps a laissié son manteau"), 284 ("Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"). In contrast, for both poems, the D'Héricault/Lemerre edition prints a two-line refrain at the end of stanza 2. *Poésies completes,* 115 ("Le temps a laissié son manteau"), 113 ("Pour ce que Plaisance est morte").

[197] Fox and Arn, *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans*, 874nB17.

of p. 365; and "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" follows directly, on the upper half of p. 366.[198] By contrast, in the d'Héricault/Lemerre edition cited by Cobb, the two poems are not consecutive, and "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" appears first.[199] Similarly, although the textual variant "raiant" may reflect the Grenoble manuscript, neither the Champollion-Figeac nor the Chalvet edition places the two poems together.[200]

Charles d'Orléans: "Le Temps a laissié son manteau"

The principal theme of "Le temps a laissié son manteau" is change. On the face of it, this theme is antithetical to the rondel, a literary form in which repetition and return are ensured via the refrain and the economy of the binary rhyme scheme. As Rouben Charles Cholakian explains, a rondel refrain may "serve either to complete (complement) the stanza's message or merely to reinforce (reiterate) its meaning."[201] Strikingly, in "Le temps a laissié son manteau," the refrain's function *changes* from complementary to reiterative. The first line—which later returns as the derived refrain—is vital to the sense of the first stanza. It provides the poem's primary subject noun, and this subject's first verb. The refrain is also an important complement of the second stanza: giving words to the cry of every bird and beast, the refrain unifies this multitude of voices with a single message. If the refrain were to be omitted at this point in the rondel, nature would sound chaotic instead of choric. Only in the third and final stanza does the refrain become tautological, serving as an emphatic repetition or *précis* of this last stanza.

In "Le temps a laissié son manteau," the tension between stasis and change is also expressed through the poem's main character, "le temps." Translating as "weather," "season," or

[198] Ibid., 444 and 534.
[199] In the D'Héricault/Lemerre edition (*Poésies completes*), "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" appears as number 59 on page 113, whereas "Le temps a laissié son manteau" appears subsequently, as number 63 on page 115.
[200] In the Champollion-Figeac edition (*Poésies du duc*), "Le temps a laissié son manteau" appears as number 14 on pages 136–37, and "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" appears as number 66 on page 284. The Chalvet edition (*Poésies de Charles d'Orléans*) does not include "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte."
[201] Rouben Charles Cholakian, *Deflection/Reflection in the Lyric Poetry of Charles d'Orléans: A Psychosemiotic Reading* (Potomac: Scripta Humanistica, 1984), 29.

"time," although the persona's essential character remains the same, his appearance alters dramatically.[202] This poem's imagery thus describes spring as an opulent wardrobe change.[203] The undress of the first line ("The weather has left his coat") is reversed in line 3 ("And has dressed himself . . ."). The oscillation of this reciprocal pair continues throughout the remainder of the poem: undress (line 7), dress (lines 10–12), and undress (line 13). Given the pervasiveness of these images, lines 5–6 appear to stand somewhat outside the discourse: they describe language and communication rather than adornment. Understood in another light, the assignment of speech to dumb nature is itself a kind of embellishment. The depiction of multiple repetitions of the refrain by every tongue in nature also provides the rondel with a fictive resonance, and the reader becomes part of this imagined choir.

Thus this poem highlights recurrence in three ways: through the rondel structure itself, through the pervasive oscillation of images of undress and dress, and through the evocation of a chorus of echoing voices. Paradoxically, the poem expresses a theme of transformation in rhetoric saturated with various types of repetition.

Debussy's setting of Charles d'Orléans's "Le temps a laissié son manteau"

Although Charles d'Orléans was himself a musician, his personal manuscript does not indicate an intention to set this rondel to music.[204] This potential is instead realized by Debussy, who published his setting ("Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau") in 1904 as the first of his *Trois chansons de France.*[205] As is his typical strategy, Debussy sets the poetic refrain to a

[202] Fein explains that, "taken in this sense, temps does not stand for climatic conditions, but rather the element that remains steadfast and unchanging throughout seasonal variations." *Charles d'Orléans*, 120.
[203] As Fein remarks, "working again with textures, the poet contrasts the coarse outer garment of winter with the softer, lighter material of spring." *Charles d'Orléans*, 121.
[204] Mary-Jo Arn, *The Poet's Notebook: The Personal Manuscript of Charles d'Orléans (Paris BnF MS fr. 25458)* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 78. This more recent scholarship contradicts earlier suppositions (cf. Mühlethaler, *Charles d'Orléans*, 21).
[205] As Mühlethaler describes, the poetry of d'Orléans found "real musical success" only in the nineteenth century, as a direct result of Debussy's interest. *Charles d'Orléans*, 21.

recurring vocal melody while allowing the accompaniment to evolve.[206] But in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the fixed vocal refrain does not act as a typical anchor. Rather, Debussy gradually alters the harmonic context in order to, finally, substantiate the vocal refrain as a harmonically stable element. Thus, in line with the theme of change, the work's harmonic plan is progressive. Instead of a through-composed shift, Debussy's three stanzas (these divisions follow the poetic form) each rehearse in their own ways the same change of tonal center. The key center that sounds provisional at the close of the first stanza becomes, by the song's end, definitive.

Contrasting characteristic motives in the piano establish a musical analog to the poetic opposition of winter and spring. Yet, as the song unfolds, Debussy's characteristic motives also serve as agents of suggestion, evoking multiple key centers and alternate formal models through motivic allusion and approximation. Debussy then counters the increasing motivic and harmonic uncertainty with boundary-crossing ostinatos and pedal points, progressively limited pitch collections and gradually shortened piano blocks. The song's move into uncertainty followed by the influx of new directional logics thus enacts the change of seasons stylistically as well as thematically.

Strophic Variation and Progressive Tonality

Each of the three stanzas follows a similar harmonic trajectory, beginning on F♯ and ending on C♯. Yet despite this repetitive patterning, the setting's interpretation of tonal center is progressive. The first stanza presents F♯ as a fairly typical governing tonic (although its scale is F♯ Mixolydian), and the section closes on C♯ as if on the tonicized dominant. So far, the harmonic plan is normative—it conforms to the expectations of standard binary form—and F♯

[206] This is similar to the composer's approach to refrain in "Le jet d'eau."

can be sensed as a local tonic during the first seven of this stanza's nine measures. In the second stanza, Debussy begins again with F♯, now with a minor third. However, F♯ soon gives way to roaming, quasi-sequential patterns that once again arrive on C♯. Unlike the first, this second stanza gives cadential confirmation only to C♯ (minor), and not to the initial F♯, and only half of this stanza's ten measures can be heard convincingly as centered on F♯. The F♯ of the third stanza is yet further undermined as a tonal center. It begins destabilized or clouded as a major-minor ninth chord (mm. 20 and 22), and acts as a node in Debussy's non-progressive oscillation. Strikingly, not just the harmony, but the pitch F♯ is entirely absent from the phrase in measures 24–27.[207] And when F♯ re-enters the texture in bar 28–29, the black-key ostinato suggests D♯ (not F♯) as a center. The final three measures cadence to C♯: C♯ minor in bar 30, and finally C♯ major in bars 32–33. Thus, while each stanza rehearses the transition from F♯ to C♯, Debussy interprets these iterations differently. Over the course of the song, he uses various means to gradually shift the sense of stability from F♯ in stanza 1 to C♯ in stanza 3.

Vocal Refrains

Debussy's vocal refrain for the rondel's first refrain line—"The weather has left his coat"—appears three times over the course of the song (mm. 3–4, 16–18, 30–31). Ascending from E to G♯, the refrain then arpeggiates once more between E and G♯. In contrast, Debussy sets the rondel's second refrain line—"Of wind, of cold, and of rain"—with a vocal arpeggio of the F♯-major triad (mm. 5–6). Because this line does not return, it does not carry refrain function.

In the poem, the first refrain line is vital to the sense of stanzas 1 and 2, and only becomes tautological (albeit, still significant) in stanza 3. In Debussy's setting, the recurring vocal refrain (R1) is antithetical to the original key center (F♯), and "vital" in the aesthetic sense

[207] Its only other absences are brief: mm. 4, 8–9, and 32.

of tension or conflict. The song's three grouping dissonances arise in connection with its vocal refrain, suggesting that the refrain disturbs the status quo. In the refrain's first and last appearances, its piano accompaniment is expanded while the refrain is not (mm. 3–5, mm. 30–32). In the refrain's second appearance (mm. 16–18), the refrain is treated to rhythmic augmentation while its accompaniment is not.[208] Since Debussy's setting gradually displaces F♯ with C♯, it eventually enshrines the recurring vocal refrain as a stable harmonic element. Thus, in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the vocal refrain is not simply an element of melodic recurrence or a marker of disruptive immediacy; it can be understood as a motivation for change: the harmonic context is altered to suit. And because F♯ is eventually superseded by C♯, the chill verbally correlated with F♯ is musically shrugged off by the end of the song.

Poetic and Musical Rhymes

The move from F♯ to C♯ is also played out as a contest between the two end rhymes that originate with the rondel's refrain and recur in alternation throughout the entire poem. In measures 1–23, each end-rhyme "-eau" is sounded with a G♯ in either the piano or vocal parts, often with the additions of E and C♯. Thus, the first refrain line ("Le temps a laissié son manteau") is continually associated with notes of the C♯ triad through both musical and poetic rhyme. In contrast, each end-rhyme "-ye" is sounded with an F♯, often with the addition of D♯. By rhyme association, Debussy thus repeatedly connects the second line of the refrain ("De vent, de froidure et de pluye") with F♯. Together with the poem's binary rhyme scheme, Debussy's pattern of musical rhyme continues the association of F♯ (the original, and finally abandoned, pitch center) with winter weather, while connecting C♯ (the finally triumphant pitch center) to

[208] Indeed, the vocal line appears to continue its augmented rhythmic values from the close of stanza 2 into the beginning of stanza 3: line 8 of the poem is set as an expansive, four-bar phrase (mm. 20–23), the longest of the piece.

the coming of spring. These connections further the symbolic interpretation of the song's progressive tonality, which enacts the displacement of winter by spring.

This musical rhyme also serves as a means for local surprise and rule breaking. In mm. 25 and 27, although the F♯ is suppressed, the E♭ enharmonically represents D♯ for a quasi-normative setting of end-rhyme "-ye." But at the song's climax in m. 29, end-rhyme "-eau" is sung—completely against expectation—on F♯. This sounds absolutely "new" ("nouveau" is the word set here) not only because Debussy has avoided F♯ during the previous four bars, but because the *musical* rhyme is radically broken.

Characteristic Motives

The song's first five bars comprise an archetypal harmonic process: after extending the tonic function in mm. 1–2 (via an elaboration of a descending octave scale), Debussy uses an unusual predominant harmony in m. 3, the dominant in m. 4, and finally returns to the tonic at the cadence in m. 5. This traditional harmonic progression serves as a backdrop for Debussy's presentation of the work's two characteristic motives. Its seamlessness enhances the rhetorical break occasioned by the initial juxtaposition of the motives' textural, rhythmic, and stylistic contrasts.

The introduction of mm. 1–2 constitutes the song's first characteristic motive (X on the chart in figure 3.11, below). Its sequencing, two-voice counterpoint evokes the learned style. Pitch materials and cadential structure also suggest an antique sound world: the passage elaborates an octave descent through a modal scale (F♯ Mixolydian) that cadences with an open-fifth dyad (end of m. 2, F♯–C♯). Because X establishes F♯, Debussy's setting associates this characteristic motive with winter.

Figure 3.11. Music and poetry in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
piano motive	X		Y			X		Y′	
vocal refrain			R1		R2				
poetic line			*1*		*2*		*3*	*4*	
rhyme			*A*		*B*		*b*	*a*	
stanza			Stanza 1						

10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
X? (+Y)								Y? (+X)	
			~~R1~~			R1			
		5		*6*		*7*			
		a		*b*		*A*			
		Stanza 2							

20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
Ostinatos in upper register									X?		Y″	
										R1		
8				*9*		*10*		*11*		*12*		
a				*b*		*b*		*a*		*A*		
Stanza 3												

Notes:

X and Y: the piano's characteristic motives

R1 and R2: the vocal refrains setting lines 1 and 2 of the poetic refrain. ~~R1~~ indicates material potentially derived from vocal refrain 1.

A, B, a, b: The rondel's derived refrains (*A, B*) first appear as lines 1 and 2. The poem alternates between two end rhymes (*a* and *b*).

At the beginning of the song, poetic lines often begin with an anacrusis and finish in the middle of the musical bar, a nuance that is not reflected in the diagram. In stanza 3, however, poetic lines fit more neatly within the measures as actually depicted on the diagram.

In m. 3 the rolled chords of the song's second characteristic motive (Y on the chart) provide dramatic contrast to the counterpoint of X. In comparison to X, Y's harmonic and diminutional rhythms are very slow, with a single harmony played at the beginning of each measure. Y thus supports the vocal entrance with an accompaniment whose simple textures are appropriate to the trouvère tradition.[209] At the beginning of the song, Y accompanies the R1 vocal refrain. Because the vocal refrain announces the change of season and points toward C♯ (the key associated with spring), its accompaniment—Y—is also associated with spring.

Intensifying the textural non sequitur, Y's first harmony presents a significant harmonic contrast to the spare, Renaissance-inflected language of X. The dense, five-note sonority in m. 3 functions as an "appoggiatura" augmented-sixth chord, a version of the German augmented sixth that is sounded simultaneously with the upper notes of the C♯ minor dominant of F♯ Mixolydian (E and G♯).[210] The hypermetric grouping dissonance associated with the recurring refrain enhances the passage's rhetorical break: while the vocal refrain clearly divides into regular 2-bar units (mm. 3–4, 5–6), its piano accompaniment (Y) shows an anomalous expansion.[211]

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[209] As Goubault describes, "the vocal line appears in its purity above long, arpeggiated chords evoking some troubadour's or minstrel's lute" (La ligne vocale apparaît dans sa pureté sur de longs accords arpégés évoquant quelque luth de trouvère ou de ménestrel). *Claude Debussy*, 151.

[210] The augmented-sixth's contrapuntal tendencies are realized in the next measure: ♭$\hat{6}$ (D♮) in the bass resolves to $\hat{5}$ (C♯), as does ♯$\hat{4}$ (B♯) in the alto range. Additionally, ♭$\hat{3}$ (A♮) moves smoothly to $\hat{2}$ (G♯). This A♮ also seems to stem from a textural demand: the desire to create another perfect fifth above the bass. Hollow P5 dyads first appear in the introduction (X), and the triads in measures 4 and 5 are also voiced with a P5 above the bass. Debussy's juxtaposition of the anomalous augmented-sixth chord with a simple dominant triad also serves to text-paint the weather shucking his coat.

[211] Because mm. 1–2 established a 2-bar unit, and because Y's harmonic rhythm is considerably slower, mm. 3–5 are more likely experienced as an expansion of a 2-bar unit rather than the contraction of a 4-bar unit. Thus understood, instead of either of these model two-bar units:

m. 3	m. 4
S — D	T

or

m. 3	m. 4
S	D — T

Debussy writes:

m. 3	m. 4	m. 5
S	D	T

Development of X and Y

Debussy recalls both characteristic motives in subsequent stanzas, using them to intermittently evoke strophic form. But he also varies the motives significantly, making changes to content and context that undermine the sense of musical return. Debussy treats X as an unreliable ritornello. After participating in the song's strategies of interruption, it is thereafter liquidated and its beginning function eventually discarded.[212] Y also undergoes variation. In subsequent appearances, Debussy downplays its original sense of rhetorical break while first contradicting, then capitalizing on its ending function.

As we shall see, these processes are not linear. In stanza 2, Debussy approximates X and Y, an obfuscation that eventually allows the work to suggest an alternate musical form. Similarly, Debussy's motivic design both underscores and contradicts the poem's refrain structure. Although Y accompanies the recurring vocal refrain in its first and last appearances, this refrain partnership is not always consistent.[213] Y closes stanza 1 but the vocal refrain does not. The vocal refrain closes stanza 2 but Y is not so obviously stated.[214]

Stanza 1: Interruptive Activity Transferred from Spring to Winter

X returns exactly in m. 6, but its continuation into m. 7 is varied: its sequence ascends, its dynamics increase, and its rhythms and sequential pattern are steady—just the opposite of its continuation into m. 2. Because the piano phrase was expanded while the vocal pacing continued unaltered (mm. 3–5), the re-beginning of X is layered with the ending of the second vocal refrain. Instead of acting as an introduction, X now sounds interruptive.

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[212] V. Kofi Agawu's *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) presents his analysis of rhetorical functions within a musical composition with the "pure signs" of beginning, middle, and ending (72).

[213] By contrast, in Debussy's "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" the piano's thematic blocks reliably recur in conjunction with repetitions of the vocal refrain.

[214] As we shall see, in mm. 16–19 the piano's ostinato repetitions are reminiscent of mm. 8–9, although Debussy does not use the rolled-chord texture heard in mm. 3–5, 8–9 and 31.

The passage in mm. 8–9 recreates Y's original texture and cadential function, closing the stanza with a tonicization of the dominant.[215] But, text-painting the change of season, Debussy omits the complex predominant (see m. 3), and substitutes quarter-note oscillations for the previous whole-note harmonic rhythm. Because the piano pacing of this phrase is steady rather than expanded, because the reprise of both X and Y show repetition at the half-note (X via its sequential segments, Y via its ostinato oscillations), and because Y's rich predominant chord is omitted, this variant of Y is no longer highlighted as a rhetorical break. Thus Y, and by association, spring, is no longer transgressive. Indeed, as we have seen, the rhetorical role of interruption was shifted to X, and by association, to winter.

Stanza 2: Motivic Allusion and Rhetorical Blending

In the second stanza, Debussy alludes to both X and Y without restating either. In m. 10, the piano's quasi-contrapuntal texture, flowing eighth notes and octave-length traversals are reminiscent of X. Moreover, this stanza—like the first—starts on F♯. The changes, however, are significant: the F♯ scale now in use has a minor third, and instead of a single descending gesture the scalar motion both descends and ascends, wavelike. The independence of contrapuntal voices is downplayed, and in place of X's original sequential patterning, this new passage decorates a fifth-related harmonic oscillation: f♯–b–f♯–B. As we have seen, a similar oscillation ended just one measure earlier (g♯–C♯–g♯–C♯, mm. 8–9)—this is, in fact, the signature harmonic structure of Y. But in an introductory passage, this oscillation creates both harmonic and rhetorical ambiguity. The start of the second stanza simultaneously reaffirms and destabilizes F♯. The re-beginning on F♯ suggests this note as the returning key center, akin to the opening of the song. On the other hand, the similarity of the motion f♯–B to Y's Mixolydian c♯–F♯ and g♯–C♯

[215] In this passage, motion from g♯ to C echoes the original Mixolydian cadence (c♯–F♯ in mm. 4–5).

progressions cannot be ignored.[216] Additionally, while the original rhetorical function of X (beginning) is reactivated, that of Y (ending) is contradicted.

At the end of stanza 2, the piano's C♯ plateau and ostinato repetitions recall the punctuating chords that closed the first stanza. As such, it is possible to interpret mm. 16–19 as a variant of mm. 8–9. But Y's signature rolled chords are absent, and Debussy layers the richer chordal language of Y with the greater contrapuntal and rhythmic activity previously characteristic of X. This new rapprochement between originally contrasting motives energizes the closural moment with a layering of multiple voices. The beginning function of X is lost, while the ending function of Y is recaptured. Further, the association of X with F♯ is rejected here, as eighth-note pattern originally associated with X now decorates the C♯ harmony.

Characteristic Motives in Stanza 3

X is vaguely recalled throughout stanza 3 by virtue of the persistent eighth-note ostinatos. However, the scalar descent from $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{1}$ sounded by the piano in m. 30 is more reminiscent of the scalar descent in mm. 1–2 and in mm. 10–13 at the beginning of the second stanza. In a pointed reference, the piano's upper line in m. 2 is recalled by the vocal line in m. 29. Although changes of contour and rhythm obscure resemblance, the fragment has been transposed from F♯ to C♯ in line with the song's progressive tonality.[217] Here, at the end of the song, X is co-opted by C♯: the appearance of the transformed fragment provides apt text-painting for the phrase "Each dresses himself anew" at the song's climax and (line 12, mm. 28–29).

[216] This interpretation is strengthened as the passage continues. Bars 14–15 present a new block in the piano that begins a new harmonic sequence. The material from bar 14 (B–D–E, suggesting $\hat{1}$–$\flat\hat{3}$–$\hat{4}$) is repeated a fifth higher in the next measure. The contours of the vocal line also support B (Mixolydian) as a pitch center.

[217] The piano's upper line in m. 2, F♯–G♯–D♯–F♯–B–C♯, becomes C♯–D♯–A♯–C♯–F♯–[G♯?] in the vocal line of m. 29. The vocal line does not include G♯, which would make the transposed replica (although not the contour) complete. Instead, Debussy gives the missing G♯ to the piano at the beginning of m. 30.

In contrast, Y makes a more obvious return. The quarter-note pacing, rolled chords, and initial fifth-related progression of m. 31 are a clear reference to mm. 8–9. Over the course of the song, Y thus assumes the function of closure on increasingly larger structural levels: the phrase, the stanza, and the piece. Yet, as we have seen, its appearance is inconsistent. While the variants of Y at the ends of stanzas 1 and 3 are quite similar, the statement of Y at the end of stanza 2 is much less obvious. This aspect of Debussy's motivic design counters the song's nominal strophic design as well as its through-composed elements, suggesting perhaps a ternary or "balanced" binary form in which the ends of the first and final sections are linked thematically.

Motivic Fragmentation, Ostinato, Pedal Point

In the second stanza, Debussy's setting begins to make important use of motivic fragmentation, pedal point, and ostinato. As Debussy layers these features against heterogeneous materials, the texture thickens, thus heightening the music's intensity and evoking the multitude of voices described in the poem (line 7).[218] As we shall see, Debussy carries several fixed elements across the formal barrier between stanzas.[219] These boundary-crossing features bind together the second and third stanzas; suggest C♯ even where F♯ is restated; and serve as stabilizing, familiar features in the tonally transient field of the third stanza. Over the course of

[218] While such layering techniques have invited comparison to gamelan music, more recent scholarship cautions against this connection. Neil Sorrell asserts that "the pentatonic scales, ostinato and percussive sonorities in Debussy's music (as well as in the works of many of his influential predecessors [. . .]) are as likely to have been inspired by the local church bells as anything further afield, in which case the experience of the gamelan was essentially a confirmation of the connection." *A Guide to the Gamelan,* 2nd edition, ed. Martin Hatch with assistance from Jody Diamond (Ithaca: Society for Asian Music, 2000), 4. Similarly, Mervyn Cooke explains that "the most important observation that can be made about the impact of the gamelan on Debussy's style is that the experience intensified techniques that were already latent in his music." "'The East in the West': Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music," in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 259. Cooke goes on to say that the composer's style resembles gamelan music in his "scale types, ostinato, polyphonic textures, and sonorities" (ibid.). More pertinently, Cooke points out that Debussy created "'layered' textures" that "share with the gamelan the direct relationship between tessitura and rapidity of figuration"—that is, the slowest-moving notes are also the lowest in the texture (ibid., 261). This description is in general true of the texture created in the second half of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," where the fast ostinato is in the upper voices while the lowest notes tend to move more slowly, but it does not describe Debussy's use of slow-moving pedal points in the high register.

[219] As such, this treatment shows similarity to the porousness of formal boundaries in "Le jet d'eau."

the song, these elements become increasingly interrelated, eventually uniting in the formation of a large-scale linear vector that supports the progressive tonal shift from F♯ to C♯.

Starting in m. 13, beat 3, Debussy introduces a recurring motivic fragment. This eighth-note figure is copied from m. 11 in the piano, where it appears as the turn at the bottom of the scalar wave: $\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{3}$. Drawn from this variant of X, the "turn" fragment also resembles the original embellishing figuration of X in its stepwise, eighth-note motion and 4-note length.[220] Unlike the figuration of X, however, the "turn" figure persists even after the end of its originating musical section, sounding continuously in the piano's alto line from m. 13 (beat 3) through the end of m. 27 (see figure 3.12, below). Debussy first employs the "turn" figure as a segment in an ascending sequence (mm. 13–16, C♯–E–G♯–B–D♯), and then as an ostinato (on D♯, mm. 16–23; on A, mm. 24–27).

Figure 3.12. "Rondel: Le temps," stanzas 2–3: blocks, scales, ostinatos, and pedals

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">10</td><td colspan="2">11</td><td colspan="2">12</td><td colspan="2">13</td><td colspan="2">14</td><td colspan="2">15</td><td colspan="2">16</td><td colspan="2">17</td><td colspan="2">18</td><td colspan="2">19</td><td colspan="2">20</td><td colspan="2">21</td><td colspan="2">22</td><td colspan="2">23</td><td colspan="2">24</td><td colspan="2">25</td><td colspan="2">26</td><td colspan="2">27</td><td colspan="2">28</td><td colspan="2">29</td><td colspan="2">30</td><td colspan="2">31</td><td colspan="2">32</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">2-bar blocks, varied</td><td colspan="4">1-bar blocks, varied</td><td colspan="6">1-bar blocks, fixed</td><td colspan="6">2-bar blocks, fixed</td><td colspan="6">2-bar blocks, fixed</td><td colspan="4">1-bar blocks, var.</td><td colspan="6">1-bar blocks? ½-bar blocks?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="12"></td><td colspan="6">F♯ modal scale?</td><td colspan="6">C♯ hexatonic</td><td colspan="4">black-key pent.</td><td colspan="6">C♯ (aggregate)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4"></td><td colspan="6">"turn" sequence</td><td colspan="8">G♯ pedal;
D♯ "turn" ostinato</td><td colspan="6">A♮ "turn" ostinato</td><td colspan="4">A♯ pent. ost.</td><td colspan="6">B♯-C♯;
D♯ "turn" ost.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="12">Stanza 2</td><td colspan="20">Stanza 3</td></tr>
</table>

The change in function of the "turn" figure—from sequenced ascent to fixed ostinato—coincides with the inauguration of another fixed element. In this same measure (16), the piano sounds an octave G♯ in the upper registers, instigating an inverted pedal point that persists for eight bars and rings across the formal boundary between the second and third sections (it is

[220] However, the profile of the "turn" fragment is open, not closed: its final note is a step higher than its first. In contrast, the figuration of X begins and ends on the same pitch ($\hat{1}$–$\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{1}$; mm. 1–2, 6–7).

finally displaced in measure 24). Together, the fixed "turn" figure and the inverted pedal imply a C♯–G♯ dyad. Also in m. 16, the bass arrives on C♯, continuing an ascending-fifth sequence begun in m. 14. But the sequence stalls: each downbeat from bars 16–19 returns to C♯. Debussy also alters the bass motive by expanding the initial leap. Instead of C♯–E–F♯—which would have replicated the previous motive exactly, he uses C♯–F♯–G♯—the root motion of an archetypal harmonic pattern, and a change that lends further stability to C♯ as a pitch center.[221]

Chaos, Memory, Teleology

In the third stanza, Debussy uses a rapidly changing array of non-functional progressions, but counters this post-tonal syntax with fixed elements that assert centricity and directionality by other means. The F♯^{9} that begins stanza 3 could signal a turn to the subdominant, but the B$^{4/3}$ chord that arrives in m. 21 is also a major-minor-seventh sonority. And rather than continuing the descending-fifth sequence, the block simply repeats. All four bars sustain a new, F♯ pedal in the bass (mm. 20–23). Yet the boundary-transgressive persistence of the "turn" figuration and the upper pedal on G♯—both are continued from the previous section—allow Debussy to suggest C♯ as a pitch center even as other progressions take place. It is as if the music cannot get C♯ out of its mind, for all its efforts to re-start this third section on F♯.

In bar 24, Debussy drops the F♯ pedal in the bass as the piano instigates a new harmonic oscillation, one that denies tonal resolution of the major-minor B^{7} and moves instead via chromatic mediant.[222] In the same measure, Debussy also stops the long-standing G♯ pedal in the upper voice. In its place, he substitutes the "turn" figure that previously formed a steady ostinato

[221] When this new harmonic capsule repeats exactly in bar 17, it is the first time in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" that a piano block repeats without variation. Debussy thus introduces yet another aspect of fixity: from mm. 16–27, each piano block (whether one bar or two bars in length) is reiterated without change.

[222] Oscillating from G^{7} to E♭^{7}, the new capsule repeats exactly in mm. 26–27. Unlike the major-minor seventh sonorities of the previous pattern, the G^{7} is further altered to include a flat fifth. As such, this symmetrical harmony is also interpretable as a French augmented sixth chord serving as a common-tone embellishment of the subsequent E♭^{7} harmony.

on D♯ (mm. 16–23). Extruded to the piano's soprano register, the "turn" figure now embellishes A♮. In mm. 28–29, the left hand establishes a new capsule that oscillates between C♯ minor (or is it a♯^{ø7}?) and F♯^{M7} (or is it d♯^{7}?)—a progression that recalls the original Mixolydian cadence of bars 4–5 (c♯–F♯), but substitutes the sparkle of ambiguating embellishment for the former's clarity and stability. In the right hand, the "turn" figure is replaced with an ostinato on the black-key pentatonic, as Debussy's slow-moving inverted pedal ascends to A♯.[223]

The motion from d♯ to G♯ in m. 30 briefly suggests G♯ as a new tonic by mimicking the Mixolydian cadences of several previous passages (c♯–F♯ in mm. 3–4; g♯–C♯ in mm. 8–9; g♯–C♯ in mm. 16–18),[224] However, by the third beat of m. 30, G♯ moves to C♯ minor. Because the work ends on C♯, the listener reinterprets G♯ as a dominant. The arrival on C♯ is also supported by the completion of the large-scale linear vector: the stepwise ascent begun with the G♯ pedal (mm. 16–23), and carried by ostinato patterns to A♮ (mm. 24–27) and A♯ (mm. 28–29), is completed in m. 30 in the same soprano register as B♯ moves to C♯.[225] This long-range motion helps confirm C♯ despite the unruly harmonies of the final progression, which suggest a cadence to A before confirming C♯ via chromatic mediant (m. 30: E^{9}–A^{M7}–E^{9}–C♯).

When the ostinato and the pedal points are apparently dropped at the end of the third stanza, it is not loss but apotheosis—the new order is established, in which these elements are incorporated rather than extraneous. The G♯ pedal returns in the same register, now as an integral member of the G♯ and C♯ harmonies of bars 30–32. Assimilated into Y's end-function quarter

[223] This ostinato bears resemblance to the pattern Bruhn calls "bell set 2" in Ravel's "La vallée des cloches" (*Images and Ideas*, 57). Composed between 1904 and 1905, the *Miroirs* slightly post-date Debussy's "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," which was published in 1904. Ravel's set is also tuned to the anhemitonic pentatonic scale (albeit not the black-key pentatonic [Bruhn, *Images and Ideas*, 54]), and its profile in the alto voice—a leap upward, followed by a lower-neighbor embellishment (G♯–C♯–B–C♯, m. 3)—is strongly reminiscent of Debussy's ostinato (A♯–D♯–C♯–D♯, m. 28).

[224] Alternately, this G♯ offers a kind of delayed resolution of the E♭^{7} (enharmonically, V^{7} of G♯) from m. 27.

[225] This linear connection is masked by a descant melodic descent from G♯ to C♯.

notes, the "turn" figure appears in m. 30 in the piano's bass line (D♯–C♯–D♯–E), and in m. 31 a variant is embedded in the alto line (D–C♯–D–E♯).[226]

Directional Compression

Debussy also signals directionality and climax with a progressive limiting of pitch collections and a quickening of harmonic rhythm. While its tonal allegiance is not clearly established, the first block of stanza 3 (mm. 20–23) could be understood as using an F♯-Mixolydian or Dorian scale (Debussy alternates A♯ and A♮ on every other measure, and B♯ acts merely as an embellishing tone). The next block (mm. 24–27) narrows the pitch collection, as the C♯-hexatonic scale delimits the piano materials in bars 24 and 26 (with the exception of the E♮ passing tone) as well as the vocal melody of mm. 24, 25, and 26. In the third block (mm. 28–29), Debussy highlights an even smaller collection: the black-key pentatonic supplies the materials for the right-hand ostinato as well as the vocal line.[227] This block also differs from the previous two because its harmonic rhythm is faster (half notes rather than whole notes) and its repeating pattern is shorter (one bar rather than two bars long).

In the final block (mm. 30–32) the pitch collection expands dramatically, encompassing almost the entire aggregate (excepting G♮ and A♯). Yet Debussy's last repeated pattern is the most compressed of the stanza: the oscillating quarter-note patterns of m. 31 are only a half measure long. Thus, while the climax of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" is supported

[226] Compare to the ostinato "turn" figure in mm. 16–23: D♯–C♯–D♯–E. As in "Le jet d'eau," Debussy uses this synthesis of motivic elements as a rhetorical signal of finality.

[227] Jeremy Day-O'Connell describes how Debussy exploits common tones to pivot between pentatonic and whole-tone materials. As he observes, every pentatonic scale has three notes in common with one whole-tone scale, and two notes in common with the other. *Pentatonicism from the Eighteenth-Century to Debussy* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 167–68. In "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the pentatonic materials of mm. 28–29 have three notes in common (C♯, D♯, F♯) with the previous hexatonic scale.

by dynamics and register,[228] it is prepared by a long-range linear vector in the upper register, a progressive narrowing and then dramatic expansion of pitch collections, and a progressive compression of harmonic rhythm.[229] These elements counter the post-tonal syntax of the third stanza, allowing Debussy to simultaneously evoke both chaos and teleology as he enacts the change of seasons at the level of stylistic change.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau"

The theme of the rondel is change, but Debussy's setting enacts this theme with novel treatment of repetitive elements. Correlated with winter and spring, the piano's characteristic motives enact the change of seasons through contrasts that cause a rhetorical break between the old, contrapuntal style of winter and the new, homophonic style of spring. Immediately, however, Debussy varies the motives' rhetorical functions, re-assigning the role of interruption to winter and thereby underscoring the stability of spring. By the third stanza, the characteristic motive associated with winter exists primarily as a memory, its identifying features eroded. Its disguised appearance at the song's climactic moment is both surprising and critical: surprising, because ending has been the rhetorical function associated with spring; critical, because winter's musical motive has been transposed to conform to the key of spring.[230]

Despite their prominent programmatic roles, in the second stanza the characteristic motives are presented only vaguely. The piano accompaniment alludes to both motives without

[228] M. 32 indicates the only fortissimo of the piece; the highest vocal note is in m. 29, and the highest piano note follows in m. 30.

[229] Bourion focuses her analysis on the "*structural decrescendo*" (*decrescendo structural*; her italics) of stanza 2, which also shows a progressive shortening of repeated blocks. *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 266.

[230] In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, C♯ has a similar trajectory: although it initially carries dominant function, it eventually replaces F♯ as the work's final tonic. As Richard Langham Smith argues, throughout the opera Debussy associates F♯ major with Mélisande and the ideal. "Tonalities of Darkness and Light," in Roger Nichols and Richard Langham Smith, *Claude Debussy:* Pelléas et Mélisande (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 133. When Mélisande dies, the king insists that Mélisande's daughter must survive, that she must live on in her mother's place ("Il faut qu'il vive, maintenant à sa place / C'est au tour de la pauvre petite"). With these final words, Debussy moves to establish C♯ major, "a key-area that has hardly been asserted as a tonic at any point in the opera" (Smith, "Tonalities," 139).

restating either clearly, and in both cases, Debussy blends features from both motives. These blended presentations create formal ambiguity and destabilize both competing key areas (F♯ and C♯). At the opening of stanza 2, the approximation of X and Y results in an oscillation (f♯–B) that resembles previous Mixolydian cadences and thus potentially suggests B—rather than F♯—as the key center. At the close of stanza 2, the approximation of X and Y downplays the perception of stanzaic form. Yet, because the endings of stanzas 1 and 3 are obviously similar to one another, Debussy perhaps uses the dissimilar close to evoke the possibility of a "balanced binary" form. In such an interpretation, stanza 2 (with its destabilization of motivic materials) constitutes the "digression" and the listener could potentially predict that its C♯ conclusion would be eventually replaced by the original F♯ tonic at the conclusion of stanza 3. Implicated in the characteristic motives' disruptive roles is their unpredictable relationship with the vocal refrains. In particular, while the motive associated with spring (Y) originally accompanies the vocal refrain (R1), this pairing is not consistently observed.

The vocal refrain itself also serves both structural and disruptive functions. As a melodic element, its recurrences are easily recognizable. However, it also appears to inspire transformation: the song's tonal center eventually changes, as if motivated to instantiate the refrain as a *harmonically* stable element. Even this process is iterative rather than through-composed: the song elaborates the same harmonic path three times, but its meaning gradually changes. The more modern harmonic language first associated with spring pervades the third stanza, finally establishing the new key through new means. Although the harmonic syntax is non-progressive, a series of increasingly limited pitch collections suggests an alternate means of communicating musical direction. The layered, fixed elements prominent in the second half of the work programmatically enact the rondel's chorus of voices, but they also work to confirm the

new key by inscribing a long-range linear vector. Debussy's strategies thus allow him to create change by manipulating the context and identities of the song's many repetitive features. In "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the poetic refrain eventually serves simply to summarize. In contrast, Debussy's repetitive musical elements—even those associated with the poetic refrain—demand significant reassessment as the song unfolds. As such, the setting is a powerful exploration of musical change, one mediated through repetition.

"Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"

In "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," Debussy's music initially appears to reflect several aspects of the poem's structure. For example, as discussed below, his bipartite musical refrain offers a musical parallel to the rondel's bipartite refrain. Insistent rhythmic motives unify the music's texture in much the same way d'Orléans's economy of rhyme delimits the poem's sonic boundaries. And yet, with the piano accompaniment serving as an agent of temporal manipulation and suggestion, Debussy's musical elements move in and out of alignment with poetic features. As we shall see, the composer's complex play of recurring materials suggests an artistic modeling of a reader's reinterpretation and recall of the poetic refrain.

Poetically, "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" is open to more than one interpretation, and the interpretation of its refrain seems to change over the course of the poem. Although Cholakian includes this poem in his list of rondels with non-syntactical refrains, it is perhaps better understood as a poem with "conjunctional refrain."[231] Certainly the refrain functions in a complementary (rather than tautological) manner: it provides the reason for every activity and reaction described in the rest of the poem. As we saw in "Rondeau," a poetic refrain often serves

[231] Cholakian, *Deflection/Reflection*, 87. By "non-syntactical," Cholakian means that "the refrain stands as a distinct, grammatical unit separated by a period, a semi-colon, or as it sometimes happens in pre-classical punctuation practices, a colon" (ibid., 20). In contrast, a "conjunctional" refrain is a type of syntactical refrain that begins with a conjunction, and "is *necessarily* a part of [the stanza's] grammatical structure" (ibid., 23, his emphasis).

as a focal point for interpretive transformation: because the context changes as the narrative unfolds, the same words mean different things. In "Pour ce que Plaisance," the locus of reinterpretation is different. It is not the meaning of the refrain per se that undergoes revision, but how the speaker (or the reader) seems to react to refrain's meaning—to the fact that "Pleasure is dead."

Figure 3.13. Charles d'Orléans (1391–1465), "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"

1	***Pour ce que Plaisance est morte***	*A*	**Because Pleasure is dead**
2	***Ce may, suis vestu de noir;***	*B*	**This May, I am dressed in black;**
3	*C'est grand pitié de véoir*	*b*	It is a great pity to see
4	*Mon coeur qui s'en desconforte.*	*a*	My heart that will not be comforted.
5	*Je m'abille de la sorte*	*a*	I dress myself the way
6	*Que doy, pour faire devoir,*	*b*	I must, to do my duty,
7	***Pour ce que Plaisance est morte,***	*A*	**Because Pleasure is dead,**
8	***Ce may, suis vestu de noir.***	*B*	**This May, I am dressed in black.**
9	*Le temps ces nouvelles porte*	*a*	The weather brings these tidings
10	*Qui ne veut déduit avoir;*	*b*	That brooks no diversion[232];
11	*Mais par force du plouvoir*	*b*	But by the force of the downpour [rain]
12	*Fait des champs clore la porte,*	*a*	Makes the fields close their gate,
13	***Pour ce que Plaisance est morte.***	*A*	**Because Pleasure is dead.**

In the first stanza, the poem casts Pleasure's death as especially affecting, even unnatural. Although it is the season of spring and new life, instead of being reborn, Pleasure has died. The stanza ends by directing the reader toward internal experience, suggesting that the speaker's external dress of mourning expresses a disconsolate heart. The second stanza changes the focus: here the speaker emphasizes that he has donned black out of duty. The death of Pleasure not only affects his heart, it constrains his behavior. The third stanza turns attention away from the speaker, depicting instead the personified character of the weather ("le temps"). The inhuman element is emblematic, adding resonance to the speaker's experience by enacting grief on the grand scale. As Alice Planche describes, "the rain is a gate that the weather lowers, thereby

[232] Perhaps, "That does not want to be fully known." The line itself is somewhat enigmatic.

closing the door that opens on the beauties of the outside world, the springtime invitations to happiness and love. For the weather is in agreement with the poet's disconsolate heart."[233] Nevertheless, the rain shuts the gates, reasserting narrower boundaries and preventing free passage; thus the weather's actions return to affect human freedoms. In this sense the last stanza amplifies the sense of the second stanza, placing emphasis not only on grief but on coercion and restriction.

Since Charles was held as a political prisoner in England for over twenty years, the theme of confinement was especially poignant for him. David Fein describes the poet's relationship to boundaries as a source of artistic ambivalence and reinterpretation:

> Charles, consistently finding himself on the inside rather than the outside of the enclosure, uses the object [the door] primarily as a means of keeping out uninvited visitors. These unwelcome callers fall either into the category of negative emotions—Melancholy, Worry, and the others—or the senses, especially those of sight and hearing. To protect his serenity from the threat of these pernicious influences, he retreats to an inner sanctum where he is guaranteed safety from unwanted intrusion.[234]

Cholakian takes these ideas a step further, recognizing their sympathy with the formal mechanism of the rondel. As he explains, "the topoi of *hidden* or *incarcerated* persona[e] [. . .] find corroborative support in the syntactic structure of the rondeau, since both are part of the same general theme of *enclosure*."[235] "Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" is one such "incarceration" rondel: just as the rain closes the speaker inside, so the refrain frames the poem itself, reinforcing its borders.

The rondel engages the theme of confinement in yet another sense, contrasting self-protection with exposure. Cholakian argues that for Charles, "the mask of *plaisance* is one form

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[233] "la pluie est une grille que le temps abaisse, ferment ainsi la porte qui ouvre sur les beauties du monde extérieur, les solicitations printanières à la joie et à l'amour. Car le temps est en accord avec le cœur déconforté du poète." Alice Planche, *Charles d'Orléans, ou, La recherché d'un langage.* (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 1975), 198.
[234] Fein, *Charles d'Orléans*, 129–30.
[235] Cholakian, *Deflection/Reflection*, 68–69.

of creating protective confinement. He hides his hurts not only from an intruding world of observers, but also from himself."[236] This particular rondel, then, is both concealing and revealing. On the one hand, its text and formal refrain describe and enact physical incarceration. On the other, the death of *Plaisance* leaves the poem's speaker without his cloak of feigned happiness. Thus stripped of his protective mask (*Plaisance*), he must dress in mourning (lines 1–4), leaving his pain exposed.

Debussy's setting of Charles d'Orléans's "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"

"Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" can be understood as a set of variations on the thematic materials presented in the first four measures. As James Hepokoski explains, such designs affect temporal focus by "negating the presumption of the forward thrust of time itself through their emphasis on circularity and return."[237] Indeed, since the first two measures recur in easily recognizable guises, they articulate a structure that approximates rondo form. Expansive intermediate episodes depart from the opening's topical frame, differing from its rondo-theme identity through increased chromaticism, exploration of wider pitch range, and more volatile dynamics.

Over the course of the song, Debussy explores several techniques of temporal disruption or re-presentation. Like the derived refrain of the poetic rondel, the music's first characteristic motive (X) is made to serve both beginning and ending functions; it bookends the piece. Yet, while the rondo form might seem the perfect fit for the recurring refrain of the poetic rondel,

[236] "Critics have written much about the topos of confinement in the poetry of Charles d'Orléans [. . .]. The traumatized 'moi' must separate himself as much from old hurts as potential new ones. Paradoxically therefore, he fears the imprisonment which is the inescapable reality of his psychological self, at the same time that he seeks to enclose himself in an artificial atmosphere of protection from possible pain. In that sense thus, the mask of *plaisance* is one form of creating protective confinement." Cholakian, *Deflection/Reflection*, 42).

[237] James Hepokoski, "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," *19th-Century Music* 8, no. 1 (summer 1984): 54. In some respects, the construction of mm. 1–4 presents as a type 3 beginning. As described by Hepokoski, this type follows the following formula: *A*–fermata or pause–*A*′–fermata or pause–*A*″ or *B*. (48, 50). The primary divergence from the formula is that "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" foregoes the formula's delineating pauses.

Debussy does not align the vocal-poetic refrain with the piano-rondo refrain in expected, or even consistent, ways. While pervasive rhythmic motives blunt the effects of contrast and recurrence, the composer's strategic misalignments nevertheless place musical form in contention with poetic stanzas. These musico-poetic conflicts allow for the manipulation of temporal strands even as the piano suggests the functions of memory and misremembering.

Piano Refrain (mm. 1–2)

The work's first characteristic motive (X on the form diagram) serves as the song's introduction, topical frame, rondo refrain, and motivic source cell. As Léon Vallas notes, the melody makes intertextual reference to the principal theme of Ernest Chausson's setting for voice and orchestra of "La chanson perpétuelle" (1898).[238] Debussy's reference is appropriate since both songs elaborate the poetic theme of the "disconsolate heart."[239] In Debussy's setting, the theme's ostinato bass, repetitive rhythms, and narrowly-bounded melodic range forge a kind of static folksong.[240] Consistent with the rondel's description of weather-bound confinement, the alternating rather than progressive harmonic syntax, roughly arch-shaped melody, and tiny arch dynamics emphasize the sense of motion in place. The piano melody outlines folk-like gapped-scale patterns[241] while added sixths and sevenths and Dorian B♮ inflections lend a hazy quality to the passage's opening D-minor centricity. This characteristic motive thus frames the song with a mildly dysphoric pastoral mode that, while static, ambiguously presents its repetitions as both lulling and obsessive.

[238] Léon Vallas, *Claude Debussy: His Life and Works*, trans. Maire and Grace O'Brien (New York: Dover, 1973), 165.
[239] Goubault, *Claude Debussy*, 151.
[240] This same topic appears eleven years later in Bartók's "Pe loc" ("In One Place") from the 1915 *Romanian Folk Dances*.
[241] Parks notes Debussy's use of the pentatonic (set 7-35) in the piano melody of m. 2. *Music of Claude Debussy*, 144.

Figure 3.14, Music and poetry in "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
piano motive	X		X′	Y	X		X′				Y?	Y	X		X′			Y?	Y	-	X		-
piano rondo	refrain		episode? – retrans.		refrain		episode			retrans.			refrain		episode			retrans.		refrain			
vocal refrain			R1		R2						R1		R2					R1		R2!			
poetic line			*1*		*2*		*3–4*		*5–6*		*7*		*8*		*9*	*10*	*11–12**	*13*					
rhyme			*A*		*B*		*b–a*		*a–b*		*A*		*B*		*a*	*b*	*b–a*	*A*					
rondel stanza			Stanza 1						Stanza 2						Stanza 3								

Notes:
X and Y: the piano's characteristic motives

R1 and R2: the vocal refrains paired with the first and second lines of the poetic refrain

retrans.: retransition

! In m. 20–21, the second *vocal* refrain is actually sounded by the *piano*

*****The vocal phrase that delivers line 12 of the poem actually extends into the beginning of m. 18

A, B, a, b: The rondel's derived refrains (*A* and *B*) first appear as lines 1 and 2. The poem alternates between two end rhymes (*a* and *b*).

Episode, Retransition, First Vocal Refrain (mm. 3–4)

The material in m. 3 (X′ on the form diagram) is clearly indebted to the music of the previous two bars: Debussy maintains the preceding texture, rhythmic figures, and ostinato on D. There are differences, too, which together suggest a heightened musical energy. In contrast to the original two-bar block, Debussy quickens the pace by introducing and repeating a new, half-bar block. The widened bass range and increased alto activity further intensify the passage. In addition, Debussy evokes a brief flash of functional directionality, which he suppresses just as quickly. The cadence from mm. 2–3 can be construed as plagal, with the G-minor chord at the end of m. 2 closing to a surprising D^9 on the first beat of m. 3. The new harmonic color suggests a turn to the subdominant (D^9 as V^9/iv), which Debussy immediately downplays with a non-progressive oscillation (D^9–C^9). As we will see, the measure's increased energy and potential directionality bear fruit later in the song, as this area is expanded to create the rondo's episodes.

In m. 4 (Y on the form diagram), Debussy drops the arch-shaped melodies and D-anchored ostinatos of the previous three bars. A scalar ascent in the bass and the use of only one pitch collection (the C-whole-tone scale) further distinguish this measure from the preceding music. As the song unfolds, this passage consistently functions as a retransition, always heralding the return to X.

Debussy uses the retransition as the accompaniment for the first vocal refrain ("Pour ce que Plaisance est morte"; m. 4, with anacrusis). The whole-tone collection in the piano provides an alienating ground for interpreting the simple vocal melody, which by itself is diatonic in C major. Thus, Debussy lends the vocal refrain a deliberate musical strangeness rather than any

traditional minor-mode mournfulness.[242] Debussy's setting also mismatches the poetic and pianistic refrains, creating a sense of structural dislocation. That is, the *first* vocal refrain (R1) is paired with the piano's *second* characteristic motive (Y).[243] The grammar of this rondel's refrain helps normalize the combination: since R1 is the dependent clause that points toward its independent successor, it is logically matched with the retransition (Y) that points toward the return of the piano refrain (X).

Development of the Piano Refrain and the Appearance of the Second Vocal Refrain

In mm. 5–6 and 13–14 Debussy reprises the first characteristic motive (X). The piano melody is identical to that presented in mm. 1–2, but the left-hand begins on G, temporarily shifting the tonal plateau to the subdominant. (This move is a kind of belated fulfillment of the suggestion made by the dominant D^9 in m. 3.) And, unlike the static plateau of mm. 1–2, the bass pedal points are short-lived, destabilized by new harmonic activity. Moreover, the thirds in the alto part of m. 13 differ chromatically from the versions presented in mm. 1 and 5.

While X first functioned as the song's introduction, in mm. 5–6 and 13–14 it is paired with the second vocal refrain, "Ce may, suis vestu de noir."[244] Because the piano accompaniment (X) is recycled from the beginning of the song, and because this piano refrain/vocal refrain pairing is repeated, these passages impossibly suggest that the second vocal refrain was also already present with X at the song's beginning.

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[242] In his detailed pc-set analysis of this work, Parks also notes the thematic importance of this hexatonic scale, commenting that "references to death are always tied to the whole-tone genus." *Music of Claude Debussy*, 194. In contrast, in setting the second poetic refrain ("This May, I dress in black"), Debussy makes use of a diatonic collection (ibid., 192).

[243] Bourion observes that in Debussy's setting of this rondel, the *more reliable* poetic refrain element ("Pour ce que Plaisance est morte") is paired with the *more variable* musical refrain elements (in my analysis, these are labeled X′ and Y). The *less reliable* poetic refrain (the refrain text that is not repeated at the close of the work: "Ce may, suis vestu de noir") is ironically paired with the *more fixed* musical refrain element (in my analysis, this is labelled X). *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 427.

[244] The melody of the first vocal refrain is simplistic and grounded; beginning and ending on C, its largest leap is a repeated major third. The melody of the second refrain is more graceful, varied, and progressive; its opening ascending fifth (D–A) is answered by a closing descending fifth (G–C). In between, the melody uses stepwise motion as well as intervals of a third and fourth.

Development of the Piano's X′ Motive

The (piano's) episode in mm. 7–11 builds on several ideas from the piano's X′ motive.[245] The half-bar motive from m. 3 patterns the melodic sequence in mm. 7–9. Stepwise chromatic lines in the tenor and bass line of mm. 9–10 recall similar material in the alto line of m. 3. Debussy's harmonic logic is diverse and without obvious tonal focus. The passage begins by sequentially replicating the harmonic pattern of m. 3 (F^9–G^7 in m. 7, $A♭^9$–$B♭^7$ in m. 8). Then, less clearly, ascending fifths ($B♭^7$–f^7–c, mm. 8–10) are gradually supplanted by semitone logic.

Countering the rondel's structural boundary, the episode links the first two poetic stanzas together. The passage increases in musical intensity as both voice and piano trace an ascent in mm. 7–9 ("It is a great pity to see / My heart that will not be comforted. I dress myself . . ."). This gesture is balanced in m. 10–11 with a decrease in energy created through an overall descending contour, diminuendo, and ritardando (". . . the way / I must, to do my duty"). The material of m. 11 anticipates elements from the retransition (Y), which, together with the first vocal refrain, makes an exact return in m. 12.[246]

Like its previous counterparts, the final episode (mm. 15–18) develops material from X′, although the resemblance is less marked. The bass part is unified by the rocking, dotted-rhythm figurations that first supported X and X′. But the final episode is the most volatile passage of the song. Debussy uses striking harmonic shifts and more extreme, mannered dynamics and tempo manipulations to set this verse, whose subject is the wild weather itself. The voice also takes a

[245] Bourion makes a similar observation, noting that the material of the "divertissements" develops ideas from the original theme. *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 428.
[246] Only the dynamics are different: in m. 4, the piano crescendos toward m. 5; in m. 12 the dynamic arch is more self-contained.

more prominent role in this episode, its new elevation above the piano perhaps reflecting the turn of focus to the grand scale of natural phenomena.[247]

The harmonic transition into this final episode is more dramatic than in previous seams. The motion between the downbeats of mm. 14–15 highlights a mediant relationship (A minor to C♯ major). And, embellishing this motion, from m. 14 (beat 4) to m. 15 (beat 1), Debussy traces the tritone between G and C♯. This disjunct initial move anticipates much of the episode's harmonic logic (see figure 3.15, below). The acceleration of harmonic rhythm in m. 17 is paired with another kind of acceleration in Debussy's vocal text setting. In the previous episode, Debussy sets each poetic line with—roughly—a measure of music. Although he begins the final episode in the same way, m. 17 contains almost two lines of text.

Figure 3.15. Harmonic logic in "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," mm. 15–18

	tritone		chromatic mediant		chromatic mediant		chromatic mediant	
C♯	→	G	→	E♭	→	G♭	→	D
m. 15		m. 16		m. 17		m. 17		m. 18

Just as in the previous episode, Debussy's dynamics create a large-scale arch form, but the pacing is now varied and the dynamics more extreme. At the beginning of the passage, Debussy simultaneously suggests "più *p*" and "Trés retenu" (vs. "poco a poco cresc." in m. 7). Small-scale surges in m. 16 lead to forte in mm. 17–18, the loudest dynamic of the piece. Measure 17 is marked "au Mouvt.," but the forte in m. 18 is again "Très retenu." The passage's the melodic and dynamic arch structures are significantly misaligned: the accelerated, crescendoed vocal line of m. 17 outlines a descending melody, thereby text-painting the downpour ("But by the force of the downpour / Makes the fields close their gate").

[247] Rather than providing a countermelody as it did previously, the right hand serves an accompanying role that is unified by a motivic fragment (the upper-neighbor-tone figure from mm. 2–3). Compared to the register of the voice, the piano is consistently lower in pitch (if the vocal part is sung as notated), whereas in the earlier episode, the piano was consistently higher in pitch (even if the vocal part is sung as notated).

As expected, the first vocal refrain appears along with its constant piano counterpart, the retransition in mm. 18–19. Just as in mm. 11–12, the motivic activity of m. 18 anticipates the return of the retransition (Y) in m. 19. But there are also differences in this final retransition that contribute to a lowering of musical energy, as if anticipating the events of the final passage.[248]

Final Refrain

The musical reimagining of the poem's temporal progression is prominent at the close of the work. As allowed by the asymmetrical constraints of the rondel, the second half of the refrain is dropped and the poem ends with R1. But Debussy's musical rhetoric follows its own logic: since we have heard Y, what "should" follow is X, and it does. However, here Debussy's setting again diverges from musical expectation. As he sounds the music for R2 (which is suppressed in the poem), he also splits the vocal refrain from its piano accompaniment, and the text from the vocal refrain. In m. 20 we *do* hear the vocal theme for the R2 refrain ("Ce may, suis vestu de noir"), but this has now been given to the piano, an ersatz vocal solo. As a speaking melody (cf. Lawrence Kramer), the piano serves as the agent of memory, recalling again the now absent poetic text. Only afterwards does the piano's refrain (X) return, as the postlude of bars 21–23.[249]

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance"

In several instances, Debussy's musical form and motivic play infringe upon the poem's "structural rhythms."[250] Hearing the work as a set of strophic variations is complicated by the fact that the nominal musical "verses" do not align exactly with the poem's three stanzas: the poetic refrain is divided—one half is sounded with the ending of the previous musical section,

[248] Unlike previous retransitions, there is no crescendo, only diminuendo. The bass-line melody has been transposed one step lower to begin on A♭ rather than B♭. The retransition's diminutional activity is also altered and slowed (m. 19). A pedal point on D, continued from m. 18, lends a sense of stasis and returns tonal focus to the song's original key.

[249] In its final appearance, the melody of X is truncated, and a new accompaniment provides a plagal cadence (g^7–d^9). Rhythmic augmentation and a decrescendo to *ppp* suggest that the melody slows to a stop, its dying energy incapable of carrying it to completion.

[250] The term is Lawrence Kramer's (*Music and Poetry*, 10).

the second half with the beginning of the new. Furthermore, component sections are not varied equally. Unlike the piano refrain (X) and retransition (Y), which remain easily recognizable, the episodes reprise material from X′ in less obvious ways, expanding the ideas from m. 3 into the longest section of the piece.

After serving as the piano introduction, the work's first characteristic motive is recycled as the refrain of the piano rondo. Yet, despite obvious correspondences between the form of the musical rondo and the poetic rondel, the rondo is also at odds with the poem. Its intermediate episode (mm. 7–11) disregards the poetic structure, bridging the end of stanza 1 and the beginning of stanza 2. Further, the alignment of the piano and poetic refrains is unexpected. Although the piano refrain is the music *first* presented, it is thereafter aligned with the *second* part (that is, the ending) of the poetic refrain. By pairing the introductory piano refrain with the ending poetic/vocal refrain, Debussy suggests an inversion of the rondel refrain's natural order—as if this second refrain were present at the opening of the song along with its accompaniment, and we have simply misremembered.

At the end of the work, Debussy's music realizes the "haunting" aurality of the rondel form[251] by literally sounding its suppressed final refrain. In part, this is musically motivated by the nature of piano refrain Y. The narrower, whole-tone collection of Y is associated with death via its correlated vocal/poetic refrain (R1: "Because Pleasure is dead"). And yet, in this setting, "death" is not ending but rather impetus: Y has always served as a retransition, signaling a return to X and its expanded diatonic collection. And X has been established as the accompaniment for the second half of the vocal/poetic refrain (R2). Debussy's setting not only provides the "missing" refrain (R2+X), he also bifurcates its temporal presentation, sounding the "vocal" refrain first (R2, m. 20), and then X (m. 21). These structural infringements effect a semantic

[251] Fox, *Lyric Poetry*, 122.

difference as well. Rather than focusing attention on interpreting the poem's meaning, the music embodies the experience of *reading* the poem. It does so, in part, by embodying the obsessive quality of repetition as well as its addictive nature. Thus, despite the rondel text's insistence, Debussy's music does not depart from pleasure. Instead, his musical reconfigurations and echoes make time itself modular. The piano and vocal refrains appear to exist eternally, endlessly recycling, and therefore available for reordering according to the frailties of memory and the whims of attention.

Chapter 4. Confinement and Escape:

"De fleurs" (1893) and "Placet futile" (1913)

Debussy's "lyrical prose" poem "De fleurs" explores the theme of confinement, dramatically depicting its force as both malign and benign. Without following any traditional verse form, Debussy's poetic text nevertheless demonstrates a subtle architecture. At the same time, the extended use of inverted associations and synesthetic connections between emotion and color emphasize the speaker's deliberate confusion of reality and illusion. In setting his own text, Debussy turns tonal processes to topical use, distorts temporal flow to create a dream-like experience of the past, and establishes opposing yet interconnected symbolic pathways. Whereas the text shows a simple framing device, Debussy's musical setting uses arch-form patterning on both the small and large scale. These mirroring elements become both confining and mystifying.

In setting Mallarmé's "Placet futile," Debussy's Arcadian pastoral is associated with elusory romantic conquest, while his neoclassical pastoral comes to represent romantic failure or freedom. Although changes in collectional systems variously reinterpret the song's symbolic harmonic oppositions, the end result provides the silent beloved with an imagined agency. As in "Rondeau"—which similarly treats the themes of confinement (enfolding) and escape—the setting's play of closure, continuity, and rupture are at odds with the expected pastoral ethos. In addition to implying the failure of the speaker's suit, the setting underscores the inaccessibility of Arcadia. The piece is modernist in that it forces a reevaluation of the possibility for escape into the imaginary ideal.

Claude Debussy's "De Fleurs"

Figure 4.1. Claude Debussy, "De fleurs," Proses lyriques, *1892*

	De fleurs[252]	Of flowers[253]
1	Dans l'**ennui** si désolément **vert**	In the **boredom** so desolately **green**
2	De la **serre de douleur**,	Of the **hothouse of dolor**,
3	Les **Fleurs** enlacent mon coeur	The **Flowers** entwine my heart
4	De leurs tiges méchantes.	With their malicious tendrils.
5	Ah! quand reviendront autour de ma **tête**	Ah! when will they come again around my **head**
6	Les chères **mains** si tendrement désenlaceuses?	The dear **hands** so tenderly disentangling?
7	Les grands Iris violets	The great violet Irises
8	Violèrent méchamment tes yeux,	Maliciously violated your eyes,
9	En semblant les refléter,	While pretending to reflect them,
10	Eux, qui furent l'eau du songe	They, who were the water of the reverie
11	Où plongèrent mes rêves si doucement,	Into which my dreams dove so smoothly,
12	Enclos en leur couleur;	Enclosed in their color;
13	Et les lys, blancs jets d'eau de pistils embaumés,	And the lilies, white jets of water with perfumed [embalmed] pistils,
14	Ont perdu leur grâce blanche,	Have lost their pale grace,
15	Et ne sont plus que pauvres malades sans soleil!	And are nothing but poor sunless invalids!
16	Soleil! ami des fleurs mauvaises,	Sun! friend of evil flowers
17	Tueur de rêves: Tueur d'illusions	Killer of dreams! Killer of illusions
18	Ce pain béni des âmes misérables!	That holy bread of miserable souls!
19	Venez! Venez! Les mains salvatrices!	Come! Come! Saving hands!
20	Brisez les vitres de mensonge,	Break the panes of lies,
21	Brisez les vitres de maléfice,	Break the panes of evil spells,
22	Mon âme meurt de trop de soleil!	My soul dies from too much sun!
23	Mirages! Plus ne **refleurira** la joie de mes yeux,	Mirages! No more will the joy of my eyes **reflower**,
24	Et mes **mains** sont lasses de prier,	And my **hand**s are weary from praying,
25	Mes yeux sont las de pleurer!	My eyes are weary from weeping!
26	Eternellement ce bruit fou	Eternally this mad noise
27	Des pétales noirs de l'**ennui**,	Of the black petals of **boredom**,
28	Tombant goutte à goutte sur ma **tête**,	Falling drop by drop on my **head**,
29	Dans le **vert** de la **serre de douleur**!	In the **green** of the **hothouse of dolor**!

[252] Poetic line and stanza breaks after Briscoe, *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 14–15. Whereas Debussy's poems for the first two songs in *Proses lyriques* ("De rêve" and "De grève") were first published as literary works in *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* 5, no. 33 (December 1892): 269–70, his poems for the second two songs ("De fleurs" and "De soir") were not published prior to his musical settings.

[253] Words in bold show the poem's lexical frame: six key words from the first stanza return in the final stanza as a remixed, irregular refrain. Translation after Briscoe (*Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 14–15), Cobb (*Poetic Debussy*, 131), and Faith J. Cormier ("De fleurs," by Claude Debussy, translation © 2003 by Faith J. Cormier, in "The LiederNet Archive," created by Emily Ezust, 2003 [http://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=4348], used by permission).

Structure and Sounds

"De fleurs," like the texts of the other *Proses lyriques*, is Debussy's own creation. An example of free verse, its mostly un-rhymed lines vary in number of syllables and they are arranged into four stanzas of differing lengths (6 + 9 + 7 + 7). The absence of traditional poetic form is nevertheless compensated by structures arising from Debussy's web of repeating images and sounds. His consciously repetitive style imbues the text's soundscape with a certain aural consistency, narrows the focus to particular images and imperatives, highlights opposites, and builds an ersatz poetic refrain.

First, the repetition impacts the poem at the level of sound, imposing a pervasive sonic texture. Marked for attention by the work's title, the syllable "-eur" recurs fourteen more times over the course of the poem. Starting with "fleurs" ("flowers"; used in the title, as well as lines 3, 16, and 23—the latter as "refleurira"), Debussy adds "douleur" ("dolor," 2, 29), "coeur" ("heart," 3), "couleur" ("color," 12), "tueur" ("killer," twice in line 17), "meurt" ("dies," 22), and "pleurer" ("weeping," 25).[254]

Second, Debussy's text mimics the narrowed focus triggered by stress or obsession, as well as the repetitive imperatives of incantation. For example, in addition to the repeated "-eur" words listed above, the text reiterates "méchantes"/"méchamment" ("malicious" or "evil"/"maliciously"; 4, 8), "yeux" ("eyes"; 8, 23, 25), "eau" ("water"; 10, 13), "rêves" ("dreams"; 11, 17), and "âmes" ("souls"; 18, 22). Like "yeux," "soleil" ("sun") appears three times (15, 16, 22). Each time, Debussy follows it with an exclamation point; it is the last word of stanza 2 and both the first and last words of stanza 3. Its exclamatory punctuation and

[254] Perhaps less important semantically, the sound is nevertheless also repeated by "leur" ("their") in lines 4, 12, and 14.

commanding placement underscore its oppressive, excessive effect ("My soul dies from too much sun!" 22).

Debussy also uses sonic repetition to enhance semantic opposition, as in "songe"/"mensonge" (the "reverie" of dreams [10] versus the "lies" of dolor's greenhouse [20]) and "enlacent"/"désenlaceuses" (the cruel flowers "entwine" the heart [3], while the speaker longs for the "disentangling" hands of the beloved [6]). The end-rhyme that pairs "salvatrices" ("saving," 19) with "maléfice" ("evil spells," 21) also enhances their oppositional meaning.

Third, Debussy's repetitions give the poem a subtle verbal frame (see the words and phrases placed in boldface in my translation, figure 4.1, above). The first stanza speaks of "boredom," "green," "the hothouse of dolor," "Fleurs," "my head," and "hands" (lines 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, respectively). All of these words return in the final stanza as a kind of irregular, mixed refrain (in lines 23, 27, 29, 29, 28, and 24, respectively), reminiscent of the last tercet of a sestina form.[255] As we shall see, this lexical frame is also associated with the theme of confining stasis.

Confinement

The theme of confinement is reiterated both imagistically and structurally. The tendrils of the flowers have "malicious[ly]" wound about the speaker's heart (3–4). The lilies look like "invalids" in confinement (15). Their scent is not perfumed but "embalmed" (13), as if already entombed. The hothouse itself ("serre") is linguistically related to "serrer," meaning to tighten. Trapped in dolor, the speaker calls in vain for "saving hands" (19) to "break the panes" (20–21). Unable to escape, he is tortured by the maddening sound of boredom's ceaselessly dripping petals (26–27). In contrast to these malign images of confinement, the speaker remembers past bliss, when his dreams were "enclosed"—engulfed—in the color of his beloved's eyes (12). His longed-for salvation combines escape and confinement. While he wants to break out of the

[255] The root word "fleur" actually appears four times: in the title and then in lines 3, 16, and 23.

greenhouse (escape), he hopes for the return of his beloved's hands "around his head" (confinement).[256]

The poem's irregular "refrain" (stanzas 1 and 4) also exerts a containing, delimiting force. Like the flowers' "malicious tendrils" (line 4) the refrain weaves through the final stanza, foiling the speaker's attempts at escape. In stanza 2, the speaker briefly retreats into the past, recalling the beauty of the beloved's eyes and how they held his dreams. Stanza 3 is the most dramatic and emphatic of the four stanzas, using six exclamation points in only seven lines. This stanza is set off from the rest of the poem by emphatic repetitions of "sun!" (end of line 15, beginning of line 16, and end of line 22). Contributing to the heightened rhetoric, its language is tinged with religious imagery. As the speaker imagines escape, he denounces the sun as the "holy bread" of "miserable souls" (18), and calls for the salvation of "saving hands" to free him (19–21). In stanza 4 (the irregular refrain), the speaker, now devoid of hope, returns to his maddening reality. Continuing the religious imagery from stanza 3, the speaker says that his "hands are weary from praying" (24). Nourished by the murderous sun, the hothouse is a kind of hell where the boredom of dolor continues "eternally" (26).[257]

Inverted Associations, the Surreal, and Confusion of Reality

"De fleurs" conjures a world of inverted associations, dysphoric colors, and a confusion or obfuscation of reality. The poetic conceit of "De fleurs" elaborates the image of a greenhouse run by sorrow, thereby inverting many traditional associations. In this poem, green does not symbolize life; it is the color of unending boredom and desolation (1). Nurtured by dolor, this text's flowers are cruel (4), violent (8), or deceitful (9). At best they are only sick (15) or gone

[256] This more benign image of confinement is also seen in the poetic theme of enfolding explored in "Rondeau."
[257] Even the end of stanza 2 points ahead to this rhetoric. The speaker describes the lilies as having "lost their pale grace" (14), a comment that at first appears to simply convey an aesthetic judgment. However, in light of the speaker's subsequent loss of hope and the religious rhetoric of stanzas 3 and 4, the earlier description acquires a religious connotation, as well.

forever (23). The glass panes of the greenhouse afford neither clear views nor protection from the elements; instead they are constructed of "lies" (20) and "evil spells" (21). The sun, the "friend of evil flowers" (16), is the dream killer (17), and by extension the speaker's soul is "dying from too much sun" (22).[258]

Within this surreal field of inverted associations, the colors of "De fleurs" (violet, white, green, and black) function as dysphoric symbols. Their negative associations are also insistent: three of the four colors are either literally restated or repeated through close sonic echo. In stanza 2, when the speaker asserts that the "violet irises" "violated" his beloved's eyes (7–8), Debussy uses the sonic repetition of "viol" to shift the color's image from delicate or regal to savage.[259] The lilies' white forms ("blancs jets d'eau," 13) no longer exude "pale grace" ("grâce blanche," 14). The whiteness that is integral to their elegant nature now reads as the sunless complexion of illness (15). Green, poetically associated with "desolation" (see line 1), bookends the poem as part of the irregular refrain. Only the black of the petals (27) is not repeated. Instead, the "mad noise" (26) of their constant dropping is realized in the poem as a tapping of dental consonants: the petals fall "gou**tt**e à gou**tt**e" on the speaker's "**têt**e" (28).[260]

Inverted associations also introduce deliberately confusing elements to the narrative, as the speaker attempts to overturn his reality. Cursing the sun (16–18), the speaker prays for salvation (19–21). Then, despairing, he calls his hopes "mirages" (23). This much is relatively

[258] Inversions of normative associations are sometimes aided by the language itself. As Roman Jakobson has described, "in two polar words phonemic relationship may be in agreement with their semantic opposition [. . . .] But in the French *jour* 'day' and *nuit* 'night' the distribution of grave and acute vowels is inverted." *Selected Writings,* vol. 3, *Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry,* ed. Stephen Rudy (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 44–45. In other words, the French vowel sound in "jour" (day) is counterintuitively darker and heavier than the vowel sound in "nuit" (night). Although neither of these words appears in "De fleurs," the poem's sun rules a day that is metaphorically dark with malice.

[259] In French, just as in English, "iris" may denote a type of flower or the colored part of the eye. This dual meaning helps substantiate the surreal relationship between the beloved's eyes and the flowers that have wronged them.

[260] There are no colors mentioned in the third stanza. It is here that the speaker focuses on the killing sun and the glass panes of the hothouse. Perhaps the sun's overpowering glare makes color imperceptible in this stanza.

straightforward. But while mirages that are typically indexical of the sun (these optical illusions arise due to the shift between coolness and heat), the sun of "De fleurs" is, contrarily, the "killer of illusions" (17). The speaker's earlier plea for salvation from "lies" (20) adds another layer of confusion. In fact, he clearly doesn't want to be saved from his fantasy of the beloved's return—which is the "mirage" the sun counterintuitively dispels. What the speaker names as "lies" must be the reality that he wishes were false. Despite his longing, the speaker's illusions cannot dispel his real loss. In the face of this vanished love, the tangible flowers seem cruel. They no longer mirror the color of the beloved's eyes or reflect the speaker's dreams. Now, without the gloss of illusion, they are just themselves, unforgivably vital in a context where dreams are dead.

Echoes of Maeterlinck, Baudelaire, and Verlaine

In "De fleurs" Debussy uses words and imagery that recall works by Maeterlinck, Baudelaire, and Verlaine—authors whose writings Debussy set to music. Maurice Maeterlinck's 1889 book of Symbolist poetry, *Serres chaudes* (*Hothouses*), provides obvious inspiration for Debussy's central image. This collection contains several other elements that also appear in "De fleurs," including eyes, hands, illness, dreams, religious language, boredom, and confinement. Nevertheless, Maeterlinck's collection does not highlight the inverted associations so important to "De fleurs."[261]

Perhaps this is a device Debussy learned from Baudelaire, whose work also finds echoes in "De fleurs." In particular, "De fleurs" describes "jets d'eau" (13), and "douleur" (2, 29). The former echoes the title of Baudelaire's "Le jet d'eau"; the latter is the subject of an extended

[261] Debussy did not set any of Maeterlinck's work until he adapted the poet's play *Pelléas et Mélisande* as the libretto for his 1902 opera.

apostrophe in Baudelaire's "Recueillement."[262] "Recueillement" also uses an important inverted association: the speaker greets Dolor as a dear companion. Debussy's settings for Baudelaire's poems date from 1889, just four years prior to his composition of "De fleurs" in 1893, so it may be that setting these poems by Baudelaire influenced his own poetry. "De fleurs," with its grotesque recasting of the sentimentality of flowers, also stands in the tradition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*). The surreal and dysphoric qualities of Debussy's colors find yet another intertextual relationship in Verlaine's "Spleen," which Debussy set as the last of the *Ariettes oubliées* (1885–1887; rev. 1903).[263]

Debussy's Setting of "De fleurs" (1892)

While Debussy's setting is largely through-composed, recurrence of the principal characteristic motive serves important structural and symbolic functions. As we will see, the music of "De fleurs" uses both small- and large-scale palindromes and arch structures to enact the poem's theme of confinement. The most obvious of these is the structure of the principal characteristic motive, but the song also uses a double-layered musical frame (in comparison, the poem's frame is a single layer). In addition, Debussy's topical use of tonal processes is especially important in the setting of the first stanza, and he uses imagistic sonorities in the setting of the second stanza. Over the course of the song, he consistently associates specific sonorities with specific poetic themes. The climax of the piece brings this system of harmonic symbolism into productive conflict with the associations of the principal characteristic motive.

[262] Other possible echoes of "Le jet d'eau" include the references to "coeur" (line 3 in "De fleurs"; line 16 in "Le jet"), "yeux" (lines 8, 23, and 25 in "De fleurs"; line 1 in "Le jet"), "plongèrent" (line 11 in "De fleurs"; "plongé," line 8 in "Le jet"), "béni" (line 18 in "De fleurs"; "bénie," line 21 in "Le Jet"), "pleurer" (line 25 in "De fleurs"; "pleurs," in the final line of the refrain in "Le jet"), and "éternellement" (line 26 in "De fleurs"; "éternelle," line 19 in "Le jet").

[263] Verlaine's "Green" (which Debussy set as the penultimate song of his *Ariettes oubliées*), associates the color green with nature's bounty—a foil to the dysphoric, surreal colors of "Spleen" and to Debussy's use of "green" in "De fleurs."

The close of the work again draws on symbolic harmonies to reify the speaker's loss—both of the beloved and of effective personal agency.

The Principal Characteristic Motive (mm. 1–2)

The principal characteristic motive of "De fleurs" is presented as the piano introduction ("S" on the diagram). The harmonic progression and contrapuntal lines of m. 1 describe a palindrome (C–b♭–G–b♭–C) whose interpolated B♭-minor harmonies mediate an otherwise stereotypical tonic-dominant vamp. In m. 2, Debussy simply repeats the C-major chord four times. Hepokoski lists "De fleurs" as an example of his second type of formulaic openings in Debussy's music, the "modal/chordal opening."[264] This formula consists of "a statement of four quiet chords in equal time values—chords with a 'mysterious' modal quality to suggest, according to the designated context, primeval times, ecclesiastical austerity, quasi-mystical reverie, or uncommon experience in general."[265] Usually, "the four separate chords comprise only three sonorities: one chord is sounded twice. [. . .] Once again [. . .] the effect is of a swaying static circularity, a gentle rotation around a central axis."[266]

[264] Hepokoski, "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," 48.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Ibid. Stefan Jarocinski had recognized similarities between the opening bars of "De fleurs," "Nuit d'étoiles," *La damoiselle élue*, and Mélisande's motif. *Debussy,* 112. Then, referencing Jarocinski, Richard Parks concluded that set 3-7 (025) is the unifying element between all four works. *Music of Claude Debussy*, 343n6. (While this set is obvious in "De fleurs," "Nuit d'étoiles," and Mélisande's motif, in *La damoiselle élue*, the collection is submerged in an inner voice.) Hatten calls this set the "representative pentatonic trichord" that is "ubiquitous in Debussy [and] used for its folk/innocent/natural associations." Email message to author, December 19, 2017.

Figure 4.2. Poetry and music in "De fleurs"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
piano motive	S		S		S			T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T			
harmony	C (hothouse):						I	vi	IV over $V^{4/3}$		I^{add6}	B: oscillation B–$B^{7(\flat5)}$ (longing); cf. mm. 71–73				topical tonality? $V^{\flat13}$–I^{9} on D♭ (Neapolitan)		
vocal line			**S!**		reciting tone on G4			reciting tone on E5				E♭–F	E♭–F	F♯–F	F♯–F	Arch aria to A♭5		
poetic line			*1*		*2*		*3*		*4*			*5*				*6*		
stanza			Stanza 1: the hothouse															

19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41
S′		S″				var seq of 23	variant of 25, with initial rhythmic augmentation				oscillating thirds				U		U		U′	U′	T′?	
C	E♭+	C	**E!** (love); elision, chrom. med., texture change								E over F♯ (love)			imagistic sonorities: half-dim. sevenths support the description of the sickened lilies							$B\flat^{13}$ (killing)	
	G4 reciting; walk to E4			quasi sentence structure:		G–A–A♯	G–A–A♯ with rhythmic expansion				Arch highlighting "rêves" on G♯5		Diminuendo closing "iris" section		U		U (motivic boundary not aligned with line break)		ascending quasi seq. of U′		Highlight "soleil" with octave leap to A♭5 (enharm. to m. 30)	
	7			*8*		*9–10*					*11*		*12*		*13*		*14–15*					
	Stanza 2: remembrance: the iris, the lilies																					

42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63
T′?	T′?	T′?		W	W	W					S	S			S	S					
B♭-dominant, cont. (killing)				Whole-tone chords (killing sun, continued) 3/4 meter							B (longing) return of 4/4 meter		B^{7}		C (hothouse) [seq. of 53–55]		C^{7}–g^{7}	e♭ [trem] resolution of B♭^{7} (death)		e♭$^{4/2}$	
T′	T′			W	W	W					X	X			X	X	A5!		X		
16				*17–18*							*19*				*20–21*				*22*		
Stanza 3: the killing sun . . .																		. . . cry for salvation			

64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79
Y	Y	Z	Z	Y	Y	Z				S		S‴?			(S)
D^{+}–g♯ D^{+}–g♯ Tempo I		D^{+}…b^{7}?	g^{6}–C	B^{+}–e♯ [seq. of 64–66]	B^{+}–e♯	g♯	G^{7}–g♯^{7} (oscillation; cf. mm. 12–15) C (hothouse)	G^{7}–g♯^{7}	G^{7}–g♯^{7}			E♭$^{+}$ – e♭^{6} – C♭$^{6/5}$ [=B$^{6/5}$]–e♭^{6}		C (hothouse)	
X							X′?: D♯–F♯					X′?: arpeggiates e♭^{o}			
23		*23, cont.*		*24*		*25*		*26*	*27*	*28*		*29*			
Stanza 4: the hothouse															

Notes:
Shading highlights the double, palindromic musical frame

S: the piano's principal characteristic motive. Palindromic in shape (C–b♭–G–b♭–C); first associated with the inescapable hothouse

T: an ostinato neighbor figure that first appears in the piano associated with the "malicious tendrils" (line 4)

U: an eight-beat motive in the voice ([E♯]–F♯–E♯–F♯–E♯–B–G♯–F♯). Doubled in the piano's tenor line and then continued in variation by the piano; associated with the lilies of stanza 2

W: a sequenced, three-beat contrapuntal idea associated with "Tueur" (Killer, line 17)

X: a pleading, two-note motivic fragment in the vocal line that begins with a sixteenth-note pick-up. Initially sets "Venez!" (Come!, line 19)

Y: a four-beat ostinato in the piano's bass line (originally C♯–A♯–F♯–G♯–B) with sextuplet arpeggio figuration in the piano's upper register. First associated with "Mirages!" (line 23)

Z: a sequenced, two-beat melody in the piano's bass line (originally E–F♯–E–D) with sextuplet arpeggio figuration in the piano's upper register. First associated with the words "No more will the joy of my eyes reflower" (line 23)

More pointedly, the characteristic motive of "De fleurs" is a recasting of mm. 60–61 in "De rêve," the first of the *Proses lyriques*, which sets the phrase "Le chevaliers son morts" (The knights are dead, line 18). While the harmonies are not identical, both passages inscribe a palindromic quarter-note motion in block chords that starts and ends with C major. In "De rêve," the piano's upper line is G–B♭–C–B♭–G. In "De fleurs," the piano's upper line is G–B♭–B♮–B♭–G. As such, the mood evoked by the characteristic motive of "De fleurs" is not simply mysterious; it is already tinged with death and the failure of hope.

When the voice enters in m. 3, it joins the piano's repetition of this characteristic motive, singing along with the piano's upper melody. The piano states the motive a third time in bars 5–6, suggesting another stage in the progressive recontextualization of this motive's function, from introduction to accompaniment to ostinato. This passage (mm. 3–6) sets the text "In the boredom so desolately green / Of the hothouse of dolor" (lines 1–2), and the characteristic motive is thus also associated with the inescapable ennui of dolor's greenhouse; the motive's palindromic profile thus exemplifies both monotony and confining stasis.

The Musical Frame: Palindromic Patterning on a Larger Scale

Like the poem's irregular refrain, this characteristic motive acts as a frame for the song. In the poetic refrain, the green and vitality of growing things is grotesquely ascribed to the flourishing of dolor. Similarly, Debussy chooses C major—commonly associated with clarity, ease, and simplicity—as the "color" of the musical frame. Linked with the unrelenting pain of the text, C major (like the color green) undergoes an inversion of association all the more uncomfortable, given our preconception of how things *should* be.[267] Through the distorting lens of poetic association, the clarity of this key comes to represent the inescapable glass of the

[267] White-key C major might easily be associated with the whiteness ("blanc") of Debussy's lilies, but his musical setting emphasizes a different connection.

greenhouse; its easy simplicity becomes the rasp of boredom, the unceasing proliferation of dolor.

When the principal characteristic motive (S) reappears in bar 74, it once again solidifies C major. Given the motive's association with the imprisoning greenhouse, this return to C is not only a vestige of tonal patterning, it also reinscribes the speaker's inescapable pain. Debussy varies the final appearance of the characteristic motive by elongating it through both rhythmic augmentation and phrase expansion. The substitution of half-note motion for the original quarter-note rhythm enacts the heavy spirits of the depressed speaker who, having lost hope (line 23), describes his weariness with both praying and weeping (lines 24 and 25).

The characteristic motive also undergoes phrase expansion via interpolation. Bars 74–75 present a rhythmically augmented version of the motive's first half. The material of the interpolation (mm. 76–77), is another contrary-motion palindrome whose path completes on the downbeat of bar 78 (its upper voice arpeggiates G–B♭–E♭–B♭–G).[268] After the interruption, the characteristic motive's second half appears, in slightly varied form, in mm. 78–79.[269] Debussy's multiplication of interpolations and palindromic patterns serves an interpretive function, suggesting a hall of mirrors, from which any escape is illusory. C is interrupted, but nevertheless, C is eventually reinstated.

Debussy enhances his large-scale arch form by using two mirrored elements rather than a single frame. After the song leaves its opening C-major plateau behind, the new passage presents an ostinato in oscillating half-steps (F♯–F♮, mm. 12–15). This order is reversed at the end of the

[268] In a sense, this interpolation reiterates on a larger scale the interpolated quality of the original characteristic motive, which interposes B♭ minor between the C–G oscillations of its tonic-dominant vamp.
[269] The separate pieces of the characteristic motive are related not only through their completion of the palindromic progression, but also because these four measures employ an underlying pedal fifth (C–G). In my discussion of Debussy's "Le jet d'eau" in chapter 3, I noted the importance of Debussy's musical "stratification" and "interlock." The terms were first applied to Stravinsky's music by Cone ("Progress of a Method") and later to Debussy's music by McFarland ("Origins of a Method"). "De fleurs" provides another example of the technique.

piece, where Debussy uses a similar half-step oscillation (G^7–$g\sharp^7$, mm. 71–73) to complete a kind of embellished authentic cadence to C (m. 74).[270] Thus, these oscillating blocks support the song's arch form: at the beginning of the piece the oscillation follows the C-major plateau; at the end of the piece, it *precedes* it.

Topical Tonality and Imagistic Sonority

"De fleurs" exhibits significant instances of Debussy's topical use of tonal procedures. The first occurs in bars 7–11, just after the third statement of the principal characteristic motive. Leaving this motive behind, the composer unfurls stepwise contrary-motion counterpoint (vocal line and piano bass line, mm. 7–8) that initiates a fairly normative tonal progression (I–vi–IV over $V^{4/3}$–I^{add6}). In mm. 9–10, repeated neighbor motion in the piano's upper voices ("T" on the chart) suggests an oscillation between dominant and subdominant chords, allowing Debussy to conflate the finality of an authentic cadence with the gentleness of plagal confirmation. Debussy's use of dense harmonies, arch-form dynamics, and the deepening of the original, ethereal tessitura contribute to the sense of sweetness, balance, and groundedness. In turn, this luxurious piano part generously supports the reciting tone to which the voice has ascended.

Vis-à-vis the text, this passage embodies the inversion of association—that unforeseen treachery—of the poem's evil flowers. In comparison to the palindromic progression of the opening characteristic motive, these measures are much more obviously tonal and palpably sweeter. Like the poem's flowers, the passage's normative beauty deceptively suggests the opposite of evil. Against this sweetly tonal canvas, the poetic text carries the shock of transgression. At the same time, the neighbor-tone ostinato (T) casts another kind of net over the

[270] The ostinatos are not identical: whereas the first oscillation suggests no change of root, the second oscillation does. However, in keeping with the song's mirrored logic, the first set descends; the second set ascends.

surface of the passage (mm. 8–15), mimicking the winding of tendrils around the speaker's heart (line 3).

At the end of the first section, the motion from A♭^{7} to D♭^{9} (mm. 16–17) provides the harmonic setting for the phrase "The dear hands so tenderly disentangling?" (line 6). This descending-fifths motion to the Neapolitan suggests a tonal allegory: the normative tonal language represents a "disentangling" of the preceding non-functional oscillation (mm. 12–15),[271] while the distance of the Neapolitan key area mirrors the distance between the speaker and the remembered beloved. At the same time, the cessation of the B–A oscillation in bar 16—in favor of a dramatically arched melodic line in the vocal part—releases this passage from a significant textural element first associated with the entwining flowers.

At the end of the second section (m. 33ff.), the lines describing the lilies—which now appear as faded shadows of their former selves (lines 13–15)—are set with an ostinato of half-diminished seventh chords ("U" on the chart). Starting in the last half of bar 33, this unstable plateau persists through the end of bar 39, as Debussy uses the half-diminished sonorities to give voice to the similarly diminished quality of the flowers.[272] In addition, the piano drops the low sustained notes of the previous passage (mm. 23–33); instead, the left hand doubles the vocal line in the same register. Despite the continuing oscillations and arpeggios, this change in the piano part lessens the section's overall resonance, in accordance with the fading of the remembered lilies.

Symbolic Harmonic Trajectory: Longing and Imagined Return

Whereas C major is now associated with the oppressive ennui of pain, Debussy symbolically associates the tonal trajectory from B to E with longing for the beloved and the

[271] Oscillating between B major and B$^{7(♭5)}$, Allen Forte notes that these measures use a hexachordal portion of the octatonic collection. "Debussy and the Octatonic," *Music Analysis* 10, nos. 1–2 (March–July 1991): 166.
[272] The e♯$^{ø6/5}$ harmony acts as a kind of plateau, embellished with g♯$^{ø6/5}$, and less frequently, D^{2}.

salvation of love. For example, bars 12–15, which restate the oscillation between B and $B^{7(\flat 5)}$, set the text of the speaker's longing for his beloved's return (line 5).[273] The tonal goal of B^7 is E, and analogously, Debussy appears to associates E, evaded here, with the fulfillment of the speaker's longing: the return of the beloved (see m. 22).

The principal characteristic motive (T) reappears in mm. 19–22, as if beginning the second verse of a strophic setting. As the song continues, however, it becomes clear that the characteristic motive does not usher in a complete stanzaic repetition, but merely bookends the setting of the first stanza (another instance of palindromic confinement). Indeed, variations made to the motive deliberately break away from the C-major plateau associated with the imprisoning hothouse. Stanza 2 describes the speaker's memories of the beloved, and Debussy breaks the palindrome of the characteristic motive in order to begin on E major. Each time the palindromic motive starts on C, but each time it closes "deceptively," first to $E\flat^+$ (m. 20),[274] and then to E major (m. 22). Then, where the text describes the beloved's eyes as pools encompassing the speaker's dreams (lines 11–12), Debussy layers an E-major triad above an F♯ drone-fifth pedal (mm. 30–32). Thus, the symbolic trajectory from B to E expresses the speaker's desires—his longing for the beloved, and her return through the reliving of memory.

Debussy also differentiates the settings of stanza 1 and 2 in other ways, musically implying distance between the immediate experience of dolor (stanza 1) and the detailed recollection of the beloved (stanza 2). Whereas the piano accompaniment of the first stanza uses primarily quarter-note motion, the piano accompaniment of the second stanza uses oscillating triplet figuration. The manipulation of phrase length and temporality also help demarcate the

[273] Whether $B^{7(\flat 5)}$ is interpreted as an altered dominant or an augmented sixth chord, it points toward a resolution to E.

[274] Alternatively, the $E\flat^+$ harmony may sound enharmonically as B^+, especially since B is its lowest note. At the close of the work, Debussy again resolves the characteristic motive (deceptively) to this same augmented triad, as we will see.

stanzaic difference. Unlike the relatively rational procession of the first section, the phrases of this passage unfold according to the logic of dream or memory. For example, in bar 26, Debussy appears to begin a repetition of the vocal melody from bar 25. However, this repetition is elongated. Instead of reaching A♯ on beat 3 (as it had in m. 25), A♯ is delayed until the downbeat of bar 27. So, too, is the F♯^{7} harmony in the piano. This asymmetrical augmentation of the rhythm sets line 10 ("They, who were the water of the reverie") so that the music pulls back against its previously established temporal flow, as if re-entering the speaker's daydream.

Symbolic Harmonic Trajectory: Threat and Death

By contrast, Debussy associates the trajectory from B♭ to E♭ with the killing sun and the death of the speaker's soul. B♭ first appears in bars 40–45, where a pedal point on B♭ underlies an extended-tertian B♭ that alternates with an embellishing augmented sixth. These measures set the text "[so-]leil! / Soleil! ami des fleurs mauvaises" (lines 15–16). Like the poetic repetition of the word "soleil," this setting bridges the divide between stanzas 2 and 3 by starting the new B♭^{13} harmony and pedal-point texture on the "soleil" that ends stanza 2. (This is the only instance in the song of a repeated poetic word that Debussy sets with a repeated pitch class: the second syllable of "soleil" is sung on A♭5 in m. 40 and on A♭4 in m. 42.)[275] Incorporated into the whole-tone collection at bar 46, B♭ is then continued through the sequences of bars 46–52.[276] The text for this passage is "Killer of dreams! Killer of illusions, / That holy bread of miserable souls!"

[275] Earlier in the song, mm. 24 and 26 highlight an internal poetic rhyme rather than the repetition of a specific word: "yeux" (eyes) is the last word in line 8, and "Eux" (Them) is the first word in line 10. Although they are separated by line 9, and their respective placements in poetic lines 8 and 10 are very different, the musical setting puts these words in the "same" melodic place, both in terms of contour and rhythm (m. 24, beat 2 and m. 26, beat 2).
[276] Initially, the C-whole-tone collection—to which B♭ belongs—sounds on beats 1 and 2, while the C♯-whole-tone collection sounds on beat 3. However, the last half of the passage sounds only the C-whole-tone collection (mm. 49–52).

(lines 17–18). Not only is the sun's B♭ continued, its incorporation into the whole-tone collection underscores its killing nature.[277]

Conflict between Harmony and Characteristic Motive

The principal characteristic motive (S) appears for a third time to herald the climax of the work. The text is "Come! Come! Saving hands!" (line 19), and every aspect of the music underscores the energy of this plea for help. As the voice unfolds a dramatic, insistent melodic line, the piano repeats a truncated version of the characteristic motive. The sextuplet figuration, forte dynamic, and higher register communicate the heightened energy and rhetoric of the passage, and Debussy uses B (and B^7) as a symbol of longing. However, the function of the characteristic motive is ambiguous. Certainly, it contributes to the heightening of the musical rhetoric. We hear the rhapsodic return of an important thematic idea as a kind of apotheosis: the original musical agent becomes "larger than life." This aspect of the theme's return therefore infuses the passage with greater power, consistent with the intensity of the speaker's request. Secondarily, the motive serves as a reminder of imprisonment and misery, the symbol of dolor's greenhouse. Yet, stated on a B-major plateau, the music tries to co-opt the motive to the work of salvation (53–56).

This chimerical union cannot hold—either longing must bear fruit in salvation, or the imprisoning theme must reassert its boundaries. Indeed, when this thematic block is repeated (m. 57ff.), it recaptures its original harmonic plateau on C major. Because it sequences upward, it enhances the energetic vector of the passage. At the same time, Debussy creates a moment of situational irony by layering the restatement of the imprisoning characteristic motive (now cemented in the boundary plateau of C major) with the continued pleas of the speaker (as set to

[277] In his analysis of "Pour ce que Plaisaince est morte," Parks argues that Debussy associates the whole-tone collection with death. *Music of Claude Debussy*, 194.

an increasingly agitated vocal line). At the moment of the speaker's greatest hope, the music reasserts the characteristic motive and harmonic plateau that belong to the stifling ennui of pain.

At the end of this third section, the dramatic soul-death of the speaker is depicted musically through texture, harmony, dynamics, and tessitura. The piano's long-running triplet diminutions (since m. 22) are replaced by sextuplets in mm. 53–54 and 57–58. Continuing the diminutional process, this passage builds to fortissimo over a tremolo E♭-minor sonority (mm. 60–63), achieving a tragic climax.[278] While there is no direct connection from the earlier repetitions of the dominant-seventh B♭ to this resolution to E♭-minor, the text suggests that just such a causal association exists. These measures set the line "My soul dies of too much sun!" (line 22). Thus, a surfeit of sun (set to B♭) eventually results in the soul's death (inexorable resolution to tragic e♭).

Signifying Thirds

The first $E♭^{+}$ chord (m. 20) can perhaps be interpreted as a kind of early threat (the death of the soul), which the speaker temporarily escapes by remembering the beloved (E, m. 22). At the work's climax, however, the motion from C (arriving in bar 57) to E♭ minor (bar 60) cannot be resisted. Similarly, at the close of the work, the interruption of the characteristic motive is symbolically ineffective. Earlier, in mm. 19–20 the deceptive resolution of the characteristic motive to $E♭^{+}$ preceded the music's turn to E major (mm. 21–22). In contrast, at the song's end, the avoidance of C (the ennui of dolor) does not presage a diversion to E major and the return of the beloved. Instead, the same deceptive resolution (mm. 75–76) simply inaugurates an interpolated embellishment (mm. 76–77), in which $C♭^{6/5}$ (enharmonically, the "longing" $B^{6/5}$) does not resolve to E, but reverts through chromatic-mediant motion back to E♭ minor. The final

[278] Notably, the highest note of the vocal line (A5) coincides with the beginning of the tremolo in m. 59.

turn from this E♭-minor chord to C major (bars 77–78) enharmonically echoes the previous turn in the voice from D♯ to C (bars 73–74). The piano's middle-register descending third (B♭–G in 77–78) not only recalls the earlier gestural drop, its "speaking melody" recalls the earlier text: "Falling drop by drop" (line 28). In the last chord, any perceived "resolution" to E is "confined" to the third of the final C-major chord, also the last note of the voice. This E does not resolve into freedom as a chord root, but is instead bound within the triadic matrix of dolor.[279]

The voice first sings its pleading, two-note fragment ("X") on D♯–F♯ ("Venez! Venez!" line 19, mm. 53–54). These same two notes are also important at the end of the song, providing the vocal setting for "Eternellement ce bruit fou / Des petals noirs de l'ennui" (mm. 71–73, lines 26–27), and for "Dans le vert" (actually E♭–G♭, m. 76, line 29). The changing contexts of this repetition makes obvious the membership of D♯ and F♯ in both B major (the harmony of longing) and E♭ minor (the harmony of the soul's death). This close connection is of course not merely musical but—in the context of the poem—psychological: unrequited longing traps the speaker in a killing pain.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "De fleurs"

In "De fleurs," Debussy manipulates temporality in purely musical ways, without measuring musical flow against the flow of a regular poetic line. Instead, the temporal dilation of m. 26 is particularly notable for the way its music radically ignores the text's boundaries. When the melodic segment repeats, it connects poetic lines 9–10 in a single musical whole, as if oblivious to the punctuation and line break that separate the lines. The repetition also ignores word integrity, beginning with the last syllable of "refléter." In "Le jet," on the other hand, Debussy's temporal dilations work by occasionally setting regular poetic lines to expanded

[279] The narrowed melodic intervals in the final vocal gesture help emphasize this confined quality (diminished thirds in mm. 77–78 contrast to earlier minor thirds, e.g., mm. 71–76).

musical phrases that carefully observed the poetic punctuation. In connection with the poem, these musical expansions pointed to an experience of immediacy in the present tense. By contrast, in "De fleurs" the expanded repetition of the musical idea highlights a *past* event associated with dreams. As the melodic line lingers on "Eux, qui," it gives emphasis to the compelling memory of the beloved's eyes whose depths held a longed-for expanse of possibility.

Harmony is an important element of the song's thematicity and its construction of agency. Debussy employs imagistic sonorities and uses tonal process topically, to evoke an imaginary re-establishment of the past that is nevertheless out of reach. Mediated through the setting's symbolic harmonic trajectories, the song's principal characteristic motive fulfills multiple and shifting functions. Starting from its intertextual evocation of death, it comes to serve as the signature of pain's confining hothouse. At the beginning of the work it moves in quick functional succession from introduction to accompaniment to ostinato. When the motive returns to frame the first stanza or inaugurate the second verse, deceptive motion dramatically breaks its confining harmony, thereby allowing a musical escape into the past (stanza 2). In stanza 3, its rhapsodic return sets the speaker's cry for help. Ironically, inevitably, and tragically, it nevertheless ascends from B (the symbolic chord of longing) to C (the symbolic chord of confinement). At the close of the work, dilated by rhythmic augmentation, it is also interrupted by another, embedded palindrome, thereby evoking the inescapable, infinite regress of mirrored illusion. As Debussy strategically intertwines his symbolic pathways, he shows the speaker transfixed: the subject's longing for rescue is worse than illusion; it is the very means by which he is captured. Thus, the effect of "De fleurs" does not rely so much on the multiple, elusive evocations of a single element, but from the tragic recognition that supposedly opposed musical elements are, in fact, inextricably united.

Mallarmé's "Placet futile" (1887)

Mallarmé submitted this poem as his "petition" for publication, and in 1862 it became his first published work.[280] Originally called simply "Placet," Mallarmé revised and retitled it "Placet futile" for its re-publication in 1887.[281] While the poem has roots in Mallarmé's early career, its frivolous surfaces mask complexities that are conversant with his more mature style. Rather than merely reenacting the bucolic entreaty, the poem subverts the "Shepherd to his Shepherdess" archetype: the conceit proposed here is that of the shepherd to his flock. As the poem undermines its classical form with rhetorical interruptions that disturb expected syntax and continuation, the work's ostensibly pastoral aspect becomes increasingly allied with notions of control. Mallarmé also feeds the poem's superficiality and rococo pastiche back into its artistic engine. His play of surfaces and recursive nesting not only frames the speaker's request in terms of an elusive Arcadia, but also glosses it as painted porcelain, an image on an accessory. In this text, love may be neither the eternal Platonic Form, nor the material manifestation of that Form, but only an unrealized artistic depiction.

[280] According to Roger Pearson, Mallarmé had travelled to Paris to meet with editor Olympe Auduord and afterwards "sent a sonnet—'Placet'—in her honour." *Stéphane Mallarmé* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 33.
[281] Rae Beth Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire in Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 273n14. Thus, although Debussy sets "Placet futile" as the middle song of his *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, it is in some sense both the oldest and the newest of the three poems (Mallarmé wrote "Soupir" in 1886 and "Éventail" in 1884).

Figure 4.3. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Placet futile," Poésies, *1887*

	Placet futile		Futile petition[282]
1	Princesse! à jalouser le destin d'une Hébé	*a*	Princess! to envy the fate of a Hebe
2	Qui poind sur cette tasse au baiser de vos lèvres,	*b*	Who springs to life on that cup at the kiss of your lips,
3	J'use mes feux mais n'ai rang discret que d'abbé	*a*	I waste my ardor but have no rank beyond abbé
4	Et ne figurerai même nu sur le Sèvres.	*b*	And will never appear, even nude, on the Sèvres [porcelain cup].
5	Comme je ne suis pas ton bichon embarbé,	*a*	Since I am not your bearded poodle,
6	Ni la pastille ni du rouge, ni Jeux mièvres	*b*	Nor the pastille, nor the rouge, nor impish games
7	Et que sur moi je sais ton regard clos tombé,	*a*	And since I know that on me your glance falls closed [unaware],
8	Blonde dont les coiffeurs divins sont des orfèvres!	*b*	Blond whose divine hairdressers are goldsmiths!
9	Nommez-nous . . . toi de qui tant de ris framboisés	*c*	Name us [i.e., me]. . . you from whom so many raspberry-perfumed laughs
10	Se joignent en troupeau d'agneaux apprivoisés	*c*	Join together as a group of tamed lambs,
11	Chez tous broutant les voeux et bêlant aux délires,	*d*	Everywhere nibbling vows and bleating deliriously,
12	Nommez-nous . . . pour qu'Amour ailé d'un éventail	*e*	Name us . . . so that Love winged with a fan
13	M'y peigne flûte aux doigts endormant ce bercail,	*e*	May paint me there, flute in my fingers, lulling this sheepfold to sleep,
14	Princesse, nommez-nous berger de vos sourires.	*d*	Princess, name us the shepherd of your smiles.

[282] Translation after Meister ("Interaction of Music and Poetry," 391–92) and Briscoe (*Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 28).

Pastiche and Ambiguity

"Placet futile" makes a self-concious pastiche of earlier styles. Mallarmé ficticiously dated his manuscript "1762,"[283] and throughout the poem archaic language (including "bichon," "ris," and "bercail") contributes to the "ironic evocation of a stereotyped and ridiculous 18th century."[284] Mallarmé's "preciosity" (that is, artificial refinement)[285] is also evidenced by the poem's layering of hyperbole with references to mythology and evocations of the medieval archetype of courtly love and the Virgilian pastoral.[286]

Vallespir remarks that the character of pastiche is inherently "ambiguous, unstable, and complex."[287] Certainly this is true of "Placet futile." The work's biographical context blurs the lines between speaker and poet: we not only hear the eighteenth-century "abbé" romancing his "princesse," we simultaneously hear Mallarmé persuading his potential editor. In addition, Mallarmé carefully obscured several of the poem's key narrative points, leaving the work open to multiple interpretations. For instance, just what is the relationship between the speaker and his princess? Mallarmé's revisions confuse the issue. While his original version implied that the "abbé" and "princesse" had perhaps already been intimate, the revised version is much more subtle.[288] The speaker's identity hardly clarifies the issue. Is the "abbé" a chaste priest? A secular cleric (abbé de cour)?[289] The head of the poet's guild?[290] And, what is the relationship between the poem and its title? Does the new title provide dramatic irony, since the reader knows that the

[283] Éric Benoit, *Néant Sonore: Mallarmé ou la traversée des paradoxes* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 2007), 23. Austin Gill explains that, for the titular use of "placet" (petition) Mallarmé was indebted to an even earlier tradition: the seventeenth-century writer Voiture first used "Placet" as a title for poetic galanteries. *The Early Mallarmé*, vol. 2, *Youth and Young Manhood*, *Early Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 160.
[284] "l'évocation ironique d'un XVIIIe siècle stéréotypé et ridicule." Michel Bernard, Odile Noël, and Gérard Purnelle, *Difficultés de Mallarmé? Introduction à la lecture des* Poésies (Paris: Seli Arslan, 1998), 20.
[285] Wallace Fowlie, *Mallarmé* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1953), 18.
[286] Mathilde Vallespir, "Pastiche et récriture: Mallarmé, Ravel, Debussy, le *Placet futile*," *Revue déméter* 3 (décembre 2006): I.B.3, http://demeter.revue.univ-lille3.fr/lodel9/index.php?id=470.
[287] "ambigu, instable et complexe." Vallespir, "Pastiche et récriture," III.A.
[288] Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 226.
[289] Vallespir, "Pastiche et récriture," I.B.1.
[290] Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 224.

request will fail—but the speaker does not? Or, does the speaker realize his poor chances, and ask for less than what he really wants?[291] Or, does the speaker advance his cause by using this self-deprecating title to flatter the "princesse"? In other words, is this "futile petition" actually doomed or might it succeed in its subtle suasion?

Form and Content

The work's structure is traditional: its twelve-syllable lines (alexandrines) are typical of classical French poetry[292] and its form is a close variant of the Petrarchan sonnet. Mallarmé's figures of speech underscore the poem's division into octave and sestet: the first eight lines give priority to metonymy, and the last six to metaphor.[293] The poem's unequal halves also elaborate the two components of its title, "futile petition." The first eight lines embroider an overwhelmingly negative semantic space in which the speaker describes his envy, "wasted" ardor, and, in the second quatrain, all he is *not*. Then, in the sestet, the speaker leaves aside negation in order to make his request. Within this traditional mold, the poem's contents may be seen as following a mirrored logic in which the order of the first stanza is reproduced, in reverse, by subsequent stanzas.[294] The invocation to the "princesse" and the reference to mythological characters (line 1) is reprised in stanza 4; the reference to lips (line 2) is developed in the laughter and smiles of stanza 3; and the description of the speaker's negative position (lines 3–4) is continued into stanza 2.

[291] Wilson argues that the speaker asks for a "compromise." "Music and Poetry," 234–35. Éric Benoit notes that the speaker's thwarted desires are sublimated into artistic expression. *Les* Poésies *de Mallarmé* (Paris: Ellipses, 1998), 32.
[292] Marianne Wheeldon, "Debussy's 'Soupir': An Experiment in Permutational Analysis," *Perspectives of New Music* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 137.
[293] I am indebted to Robert S. Hatten for this wording.
[294] Vallespir, "Pastiche et récriture," I.C.1.

Formal Disjunctures

Mallarmé's ostensibly classical poem is also subject to several structural disjunctures or tensions. For instance, in line 6, Mallarmé's list ("Ni la pastille ni du rouge, ni Jeux mièvres") contravenes the expected caesura of the alexandrine line: instead of a pause in the middle of the twelve-syllable line, the elements in the list divide the line into three asymmetrical groups of syllables, 5•4•3.[295] But perhaps one of the most obvious instances of structural disjunctures is the rhetorical block occurring between lines seven and eight: the interjection ("Blond whose divine hairdressers are goldsmiths!"), which closes the octave. This appears to be a misplaced clause, one that should have been used as an invocation, as was "Princess!" in the opening. While the divide between octave and sestet follows the speaker's change of attention and figurative style (as described above), it also bisects the speaker's argument. Indeed, the dependent clauses of quatrain 2 *require* the main clause presented by the sestet. The interjection of line 8 thus increases the poem's sense of grammatical delay, heightening the drama of the structural divide.

The final six lines of the poem exhibit two further interruptions, both signaled by hesitant or mystical ellipses. The tension generated by these false starts and subsequent rhetorical convolutions is a crucial aspect of the performative force of the poem. The fragmentation opens a numinous, magical space in which the *princesse*, whose lips can conjure Hebe on a cup, might just as miraculously cause the lover's picture to appear on an object in his own poem. As Wenk explains, "The threefold appearance of the phrase 'Nommez-nous' brings to our attention the incantatory power of words to create by naming."[296]

[295] Debussy's setting (mm. 12–14), emphasizes and exacerbates the poetic asymmetries of this line, as we will see.
[296] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 256.

Elaboration, Surface, and Containment

In tercet 1, the elliptical interruption is used to insert a filigreed metaphor, likening the laughter of the *princesse* to frolicking lambs (lines 9–11). This seemingly tangential image is reprised and expanded in tercet 2, where it constitutes the heart of the speaker's request (line 14). In this sense, descriptive elaboration is eventually instantiated as structural. In tercet 2, the ellipses signal an interpolation that speaks to both recursive containment and surface features. In this clause, the speaker describes a *possible picture* of himself in his new, imagined role as the fluting demigod, Pan (line 13). The nineteenth-century writer evokes an eighteenth-century salon, and then places within it a yet more antique Arcadia.[297] Positioned as a decoration on the surface of an object described in the octave, the speaker's image complicates the relationship between recursive containers, since "the Subject is *in* the decorative object and outside it, for this object is an artistic product like his own."[298]

The obsession with the peripheral and inconsequential (both as lesser objects and lesser gods) constitutes one of the poem's semantic pivots, for the peripheral may also suggest the periphery—the boundary. While the first line prefigures the last, it is only in the last line that the lover finally voices his request: that the beloved name him shepherd of her smiles. Wenk argues that "the poet implies that the lady has been too free with her smiles, feeding on the ardor of those around her. He would become the shepherd—and in pastoral poetry one naturally reads *berger* as *amant*—who would keep the flock under control."[299] As "shepherd," therefore, the lover would be both granted rights of authority and charged as protector; both responsibilities that hinge on a determination of boundaries.

[297] Vallespir, "Pastiche et récriture," section I.C.2.
[298] Gordon, *Ornament, Fantasy, and Desire*, 191.
[299] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 256.

Formal Interruptions and Control

The sestet's elliptical intercuts may also be interpreted, then, in light of the poem's principal conceit, the idea of suggesting oneself for the role of shepherd. The untamed, meandering asides are repeatedly juxtaposed with the vectored syntax of the lover's request; eventually they are contained within it, the boundaries secure. Yet another shepherding is expressed sonically in lines 10 and 11. Here, the excessive internal rhymes (troupeau/agneaux and (broutant/bêlant) fictively embody the speaker's desire to guard the beloved's smiles—his verse already controls them.

In contrast to the usual interpretation of the longing for Arcadia (that is, the desire and nostalgia for the natural or uncomplicated, the innocent), here the bucolic stands as symbol for another kind of civilization. The lover wants to corral the unruly smiles of his beloved, the "lambs" who feed happily on promises of love. The conceit suggests, not freedom, but romantic domestication. In the speaker's vision of the bucolic, his beloved will become civilized. Thus, the poem's involuted tension between the cultivated artifices of civilization and rural, idealized nature is *inversely* correlated with notions of freedom and containment. In this reading, the beloved's freedom may be enabled only by her avoidance of the lover's Arcadian fantasy.

Debussy's Setting of Mallarmé's "Placet futile"

Debussy's setting "composes-out" the song's title using a number of different musical parameters. In terms of thematic materials, the work's characteristic motive and vocal refrains present opposing gestures that may be provisionally interpreted as negation (or resignation) and request. In addition, Debussy deploys pastoral topoi oppositionally, using them to enact the work's dramatic narrative. At times disturbing the song's pastoral mode and repacing Mallarmé's formal structures, Debussy's play of musical closure and continuity works out the

poem's rhetorical tension between control and freedom. Finally, Debussy also expresses the characters' musical agency through a collectional symbolism that undergoes interpretational shifts, suggesting, in turn, both agreement and opposition.

Pastoral Pastiche

Like the poem's focus on surfaces and objects, Debussy's setting makes a serious play of musical textures, moving through a series of inflected pastoral topoi (see the diagram in figure 4.4). The most pervasive of these is what I call the neoclassical pastoral, which appears first at the opening of the piece. Here, thirds (m. 1) and tenths (mm. 4–5) combine with parallel fifths in the bass (mm. 4–7) to sound the prototypical sonorities of the pastoral topic. An inverted pedal on the major second "F–G" is suspended throughout bars 4, 5 and 6. In addition, the major mode and peaceful dynamic markings suggest serene rusticity. Motion to the first cadence, in bar 7, is effected through the subdominant—another characteristic trait of the topic. Debussy first marks this pastoral as *neoclassical* by invoking the formal and archaic minuet ("With the movement of a slow Minuet," m. 1). Additionally, as Wilson describes, the melody of the main motive (mm. 1–2) is a variation on a conventional eighteenth-century model.[300]

[300] Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 235–36.

Figure 4.4. Poetry and music in "Placet futile"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
piano motive	X	Y↑	P	Y≈	Y≈		X	X	Y + X′ (bass register)									
center, genera	g	→G♭	g/G						F				E♭	G♭ WT		C♭?	to E♭?	
pastoral type	neoclassical									Spanish			// dramatic interruption //				Spanish	
vocal line			P					X	X′						P″?			
poetic stanza			Quatrain 1									Quatrain 2						

19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
X	Y≈′	Y≈′	(X)		X″					X		Y≈	7ths	7ths	
g	E♭?			→G♭	G♭, (E♭?)	D♭ WT		G♭ pentatonic (black keys)		g/G			G mixolydian (white keys)		
neoclassical						Spanish		Arcadian; flute trills		neoclassical			Spanish?		
N					N′						P		7^{th} Gap?		
Tercet 1					Tercet 2										

Notes:

X: gapped scalar descent, originally from D–F

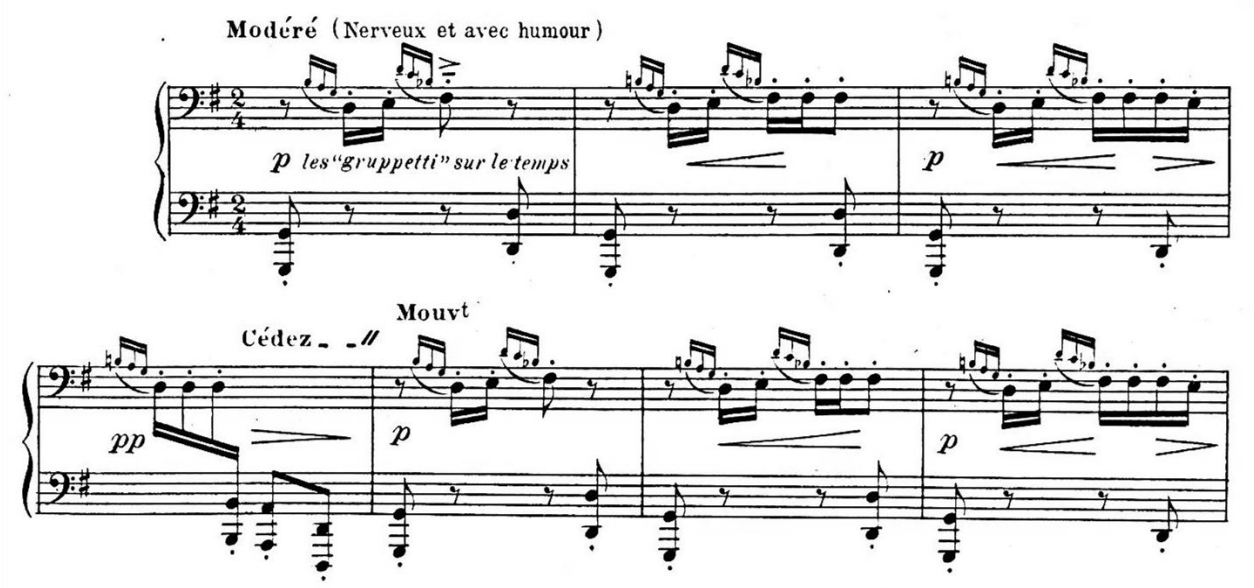
Y: rhythmic motive beginning with dotted sixteenth. **Y**↑: bass melody as ascending hexachord, D♭–B♭. **Y**≈: bass melody as wave-like rather than directed

P: descending 6^{th}, originally B♭–D on "Princesse!" in m. 3, both voice and piano. (Note also descending 6^{th}, D–F♯ on "tombé" [m. 15])

N: vocal refrain; originally D♭–D♮–G♮ (mm.18–19) on "Nommez-nous," then D♭–D♭–G♭ (mm. 23–24)

As the piece progresses, the initial neoclassical pastoral is significantly inflected by two subtypes: an exotic, theatrical pastoral in mm. 10–13 and, later, an Arcadian pastoral in mm. 27–28.[301] After the opening passage in the neoclassical pastoral (mm. 1–9) the music's texture changes markedly: as the left hand chords continue the parallel triadic motion from the opening, now in 6/3 position, the right-hand lightly arpeggiates (downward) through the octave. The motion of the hand through the arpeggio closely mimes Spanish castanet technique. The figure is also very similar to the embellishment Debussy uses in "Minstrels" (figure 4.5) perhaps in emulation of the pecussive ornamentation of the bones. He distorts the basic pastoral topic again in bars 27 and 28. Here, the black-key pentatonic,[302] the trills, and the arpeggiated riff (m. 28) evoke an Arcadia: ancient, magical, and illusory.[303]

Figure 4.5. Claude Debussy, "Minstrels," Préludes, *vol. 1, no. 12, mm. 1–7.*[304]



[301] Carmen Sabourin identifies three repetitions of the tonal formula V/V–V–I within the song: F, mm. 4–10; E♭, mm. 10–13; and G♭, mm. 22–27. "Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé de Claude Debussy: La relation texte-musique" (master's thesis, McGill University, 1981), 94–95. Notably, these formulaic repetitions roughly coincide with the first presentation of each topical type.
[302] As Wenk describes, "The pentatonic scale appears in melodic fragments throughout the song, and governs the entire texture at the point at which the pastoral images appear most strongly." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 263.
[303] Vallespir also notes Debussy's use of the pentatonic scale to create a reference to antiquity. "Pastiche et récriture," II.B.2.
[304] Claude Debussy, *Préludes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Durand, 1910).

Both of these subtypes are already present, to some degree, in the initial neoclassical pastoral. For instance, the "Spanish" influence may be heard in bar 4, where the use of A♭ references the Phrygian scale. The rhythm of m. 2—reprised as a recurring motive beginning in m. 4—recalls the *habanera* accompaniment pattern (although not the meter) of the composer's "La soirée dans Grenade" (figure 4.6) and "La puerta del vino" (figure 4.7). Similarly, the black-key pentatonic scale of the Arcadian pastoral is both prefigured and opposed by the opening melody (mm. 1–2), which inscribes the white-key pentatonic scale on F.[305]

Figure 4.6. Claude Debussy, "La soirée dans Grénade," Estampes, *no. 2, mm. 1–4*[306]

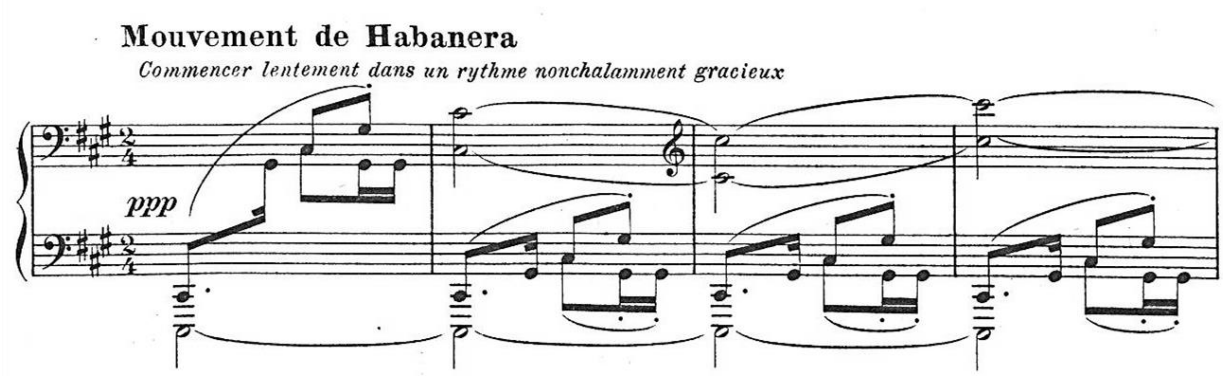
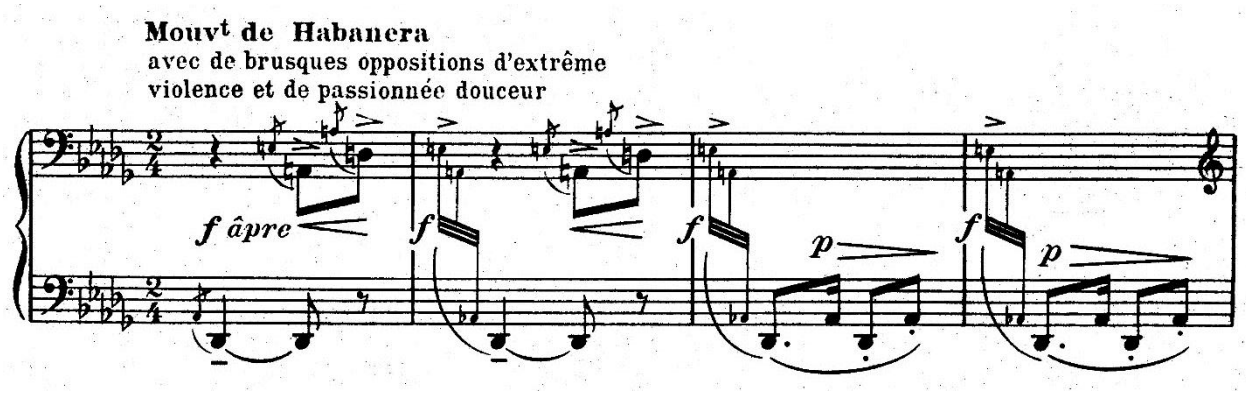


Figure 4.7. Claude Debussy, "La puerta del vino," Préludes, *vol. 2, no. 3, mm. 1–4*[307]



[305] Jeannette Roe, "The Performative Voice in the Poetics of Stéphane Mallarmé and the *Mélodies* of Claude Debussy" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1997), 90.
[306] Claude Debussy, "La soirée dans Grénade," *Estampes* (Paris: Durand, 1903).
[307] Claude Debussy, "La puerta del vino," *Préludes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Durand, 1913).

Debussy then aligns these pastoral subtypes with Mallarmé's surfaces: the theatrical "Spanish" pastoral first accompanies the speaker's emphatic song-and-dance enumeration of *his beloved's* personal effects (see lines 5 and 6 of the poem); in contrast, the musical evocation of "Arcadia" sounds the *speaker's* picture (this is described in line 13 of the poem). It is thus that these pastoral "surfaces" are made oppositional: what belongs to the *princesse* is limned in the lighter, more frivolous exotic; the dreams of the speaker are realized only in an imaginary, mythical space.

"Futile Petition" and the Characteristic Motive

Debussy "composes-out" the opposed energies of his title using several different musical parameters, the first of which is the piano's characteristic motive (mm. 1–2).[308] Its first aspect is a gentle, downward-moving exhalation, underscored by a diminuendo.[309] Countering this, in the bass, a rhythmically charged line ascends, crescendo. Further motivation for pairing these two gestures is their ambit: both move stepwise through the space of a sixth.[310] The opposing motions of resigned descent and dynamic ascent pervade the work, and—as we shall see—come to be associated with the poem's main protagonists.[311] Debussy's setting thus gives a kind of gestural agency to the unattainable beloved, who is silent throughout Mallarmé's sonnet.

Vocal Refrains

Mallarmé's textual repetitions motivate Debussy to create two vocal refrains. Notably, the first descends; the second ascends. The first of these is the invocation on "Princesse!" which

[308] As Wenk argues, "In Debussy's *Placet futile* both the integrity of the work as a whole and the relation of the music to the text develop from the beginning of the song." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 257.
[309] It is significant that this introit gesturally recapitulates the "Soupir" of the first song in the set.
[310] Roe observes that "the interval of a sixth [. . .] recurs throughout the piece as a kind of metaphor for the pleading voice." "Performative Voice," 90. See also Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 263.
[311] As such, they embody the notion of "thyrsus" as defined by Elizabeth McCombie. She explains that "thyrsus" represents "a counterpoint of two different impulses within the text or music. [. . .] a telos of repetition and familiarity, against which improvisatory elements of open invention and variation can play." *Mallarmé and Debussy: Unheard Music, Unseen Text* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 204.

falls a minor sixth (m. 3). In bar 29, the voice reprises this gesture on nearly the same pitches for the second appearance of "Princesse,"—in this case, the interval is that of a *major* sixth. The other repetition occurs with "Nommez-nous," anacrustic to bars 19 and 23. Again, the melodic gestures are nearly identical (in the first case, D♭–D♮–G; in the second, D♭–D♭–G♭), as are their dramatic dynamics and rhythms (crescendo of two sixteenths to a quarter note, followed by a quarter rest).

These repetitions—both musical and textual—provide a means for interpreting the ascending and descending gestures heard at the outset of the work. The descent on "Princesse" belongs to her world, to reality as it now is. With the repetitions of "Nommez-nous," on the other hand, the poem's speaker refers to himself. This rising gesture represents his petition; its increasing chromaticism drives it further and further from the reality of the beloved. Figure 4.8, which also contains information relating to my subsequent discussion, traces the work's accumulation of binary correlations, beginning with this motivic aspect.

Figure 4.8. Process of oppositional characterization in Debussy's "Placet futile"

descent (deferential; futile?)	ascent (petition)
princesse ("Princesse!")	*abbé* ("Nommez-nous")
reality	imagination, desire
"Spanish" pastoral	"Arcadian" pastoral
civilization, artifice	nature
surfaces	boundaries
G / white notes	G♭ / black notes
freedom	boundedness

With regard these gestures, the descending sixth begun in the opening bar (and its recurrences throughout the piece), combined with the *vocal* outline of a descending sixth in bar 3, evoke a particular aspect of the speaker's relationship to the beloved (Debussy sets her name to this intervallic descent). These descending gestures could embody the speaker's reverential attitude, a genuflection meant to help further his suit. Or perhaps they signal his resignation in

the face of the beloved's (feared) refusal. In contrast, the *ascending* sixth of bar 2 (which counters the motion of bar 1, and introduces an oppositional scalar collection), along with the ascending fourth on "Nommez-nous" belong to the abbé's request or hope. Again, these gestures are particularly telling because of the syntax of their deployment—the descent (evocative of deference or futility) prior to the ascent (which mimes entreaty), and because they recur in the vocal line associated with specific text that seems to point to the two opposing characters (or stances, outcomes) of the poem. My goal here is not to attempt a detailed explication of their gestural or semantic quality but to show how these motives—which carry semantic content as well—contribute to the emerging narrative of opposing poles.

Tension between Closure and Continuity

Debussy's setting creates tension between closure and continuity, developing this conceit both in relationship to Mallarmé's poetic structures and within the musical frame per se. The song offers finality at its opening and inserts closure in the midst of kinetic flow, then undermines closure at its most expected points. Often, the shape of this narrative moves from more closed to more open, a patterning that is initiated at the start of the song. As we have seen, the work's characteristic motive begins with a feint at cadence; only then does it present the kinetically charged material of continuation.

Contending with the continuities suggested by Mallarmé's poetic lines, Debussy's setting exaggerates the pauses associated with the vocal refrains. Unsurprisingly, Debussy follows each "Nommez-nous" with a quarter-note rest (mm. 19, 24), an intuitive musical cue for Mallarmé's ellipses. More remarkably, he uses the same attention-getting caesuras for both statements of "Princesse," which Mallarmé punctuates first with an exclamation mark (line 1) and then only with a comma (line 14). Then, in the middle of the speaker's listing of objects (quatrain 2), Debussy problematizes the music's pastoral aspect with a significant rhetorical irruption. In m.

13 the repeating castanet texture is thrown off mid-measure by an abrupt cadence to E♭, whose forte block chords underscore the sudden drama of the recitative. Texturally unprepared and awkward, this overly emphatic punctuation interrupts both the vocal and poetic lines, implying the speaker's speaker's agitation despite his innocuous words.[312]

On the other hand, Debussy's temporal and harmonic treatment of the sonnet's structural divisions points towards increased continuity. While nearly four beats separate quatrain 1 from quatrain 2 (mm. 10–11), only a quarter rest intervenes between the end of quatrain 2 and the beginning of the sestet (m. 18). This pacing of the poem's strongest structural divide suggests that the speaker is rushing the poem's recitation; the pastoral is no longer delivered in a placid manner. Early on (m. 7), Debussy presents the work's only cadence (plagal, at that) to an unqualified g-minor harmony (the song's nominal tonic). Subsequent cadences do not recapture this quality of uncomplicated closure. In part, this is due to the uncertainty of tonal functioning: since traditional functionality has been evoked, more distantly related keys are potentially less stable. In part, this is due to Debussy's treatment of texture and sonority. For example, in m. 10, elision with a new topic undermines the sense of closure implied by the imperfect authentic cadence to F. Similarly, at bar 28 the ephemeral "flute" riff on dissipates ("molto diminuendo") as if fading away. Even the work's ending is equivocal. Debussy sustains G, but the addition of extended partials, including F♮, could imply either a weighting or a destabilizing of the harmony. Complicating the issue, the ending (from m. 31) is a variation of the music from m. 5, which originally set the *opening* vocal line.

Together with the vocal refrains of "Nommez-nous," Debussy repeatedly uses the piano's characteristic motive to create a blending between, or confusion of, ending and beginning. The

[312] Almost immediately, Debussy restores the music's pastoral character, undercutting the subsequent vocal high point with yet another disruption—a subito piano shift to long, sustained chords.

vocal refrain's melodic ascent from dominant to tonic may establish a key's centricity as either a beginning or ending gesture. In this respect, the ascending fourth acts as a curious agent in Debussy's narrative of opening and closing: it acts as what McCombie would call a "pli." She explains the concept of this theoretical "fold" as

> heard or read gestures that are both opening and closural by [their] concealing and revealing motion. The figure contains the two movements in their simultaneous relation, neither excluded from one another nor united.[313]

McCombie applies this idea—also used by Émile Noulet and Derrida—to her understanding of Mallarmé's fan poems: the "pli" is the dividing fold that both separates and connects separate spokes of the fan.[314]

Precisely where the poetic volta signals departure (m. 18), the vocal refrain signals the beginning of the sestet. And the piano's characteristic motive—which originally carried a beginning function—follows immediately (mm. 19–21 present a compressed and varied version of mm. 1–5). Debussy repeats the same formula for the opening of the final tercet (mm. 23–24). For the setting of the poem's final line, Debussy reprises both the characteristic motive and the vocal refrain for "Princesse." In this, he follows Mallarmé's patterning, using the poem's ending to mirror its beginning.

Harmonic Symbolism

In "Placet futile," as we will see, Debussy also expresses the conflict between futility and desire through a symbolic conflict between G♮ and G♭. Moving kaleidoscopically, the song combines tonal tendencies with alternate scales and post-tonal sonorities. As the work unfolds, its harmonic symbolism is therefore reframed through collectional reinterpretation. The piano's

[313] McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy*, 204.
[314] McCombie, *Mallarmé and Debussy*, 204.

characteristic motive provides the first juxtaposition, where the G-dorian collection of m. 1[315] is contradicted by the D♭ dominant of m. 2. Gesturally, the music associates the key of G with descent (negation) and the key of G♭ with ascent (request). The D♮ dominant of m. 3 that accompanies the descending vocal refrain on "Princesse" (m. 3) thus reiterates the association of G♮ with negation.

Measures 14–15 are the first to use G♭ as a sustained pitch. Their whole-tone planing feels static, harmonically weightless. This lack of direction mirrors the text of line 7 in the poem, as the *abbé* says that his beloved's regard, far from being *directed*, is "closed" to him. Yet, as Wilson argues, because this poetic line has suggestive connotations, the G♭ whole-tone collection may also be associated with desire.[316] At the end of m. 15, the vocal line falls from D to F♯. This is the song's only instance of a descending sixth dyad that is *not* sung to the poetic refrain "Princesse." Perhaps this obscurred reference to the refrain element, reimagined to include (enharmonically) G♭, suggests a momentary approximation of the two oppositional elements.

The work's use of whole-tone scales posits another interpretation for D♭: perhaps it could be understood not as a dominant to G♭, but as a member of the G♮-whole-tone collection. Indeed, except for G♭, the song's other points of repeated emphasis (G, F, C♭, E♭, and D♭) all belong to the same hexatonic scale. Yet when Debussy returns to the conflict between G and G♭ in his setting of the sestet, D♭ eventually realizes its tonal implications. The speaker begins his request

[315] As Wilson remarks, the first measure could imply a cadence to G, B♭, or F. "Music and Poetry," 236. However, because the song validates G as a pitch center both early on (m. 4, m. 7) and at its ending (mm. 31–34), I interpret the collection in m. 1 as symbolically belonging to G. Even given this measure's tonal ambiguities, its collection does not belong to G♭.

[316] "Since Debussy was probably familiar with the 1883 version of the poem where the Princess does in fact succumb to her suitor, and with the French poetic tradition equating closed eyes with sexual pleasure (he set both Baudelaire's 'Le jet d'eau' and Verlaine's 'En sourdine' in the 1880s), it is likely that the static quality of the wholetone harmonies here are designed to represent a longing for physical ecstasy." Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 241). In contrast, as we have seen, Parks theorizes that Debussy's whole-tone collections are associated with death, not longing (see note 26).

("Nommez-nous") on D♭ (request) but immediately turns to D♮, thereby returning the music to G minor (negation) as he starts to describe the laughter of the princess (m. 19).[317] As this passage continues, the octatonic flavor of mm. 20–21[318] temporarily places G♮ and G♭ on an equal footing and suggesting a fleeting détente between the oppositional pairs.[319] The song does not sustain this equilibrium. When the speaker repeats his request at the beginning of the final tercet (mm. 23–24), D♭ finally ushers in G♭. As the speaker envisions the realization of his desires, the D♭ dominant of mm. 25–26 resolves to the G♭ pentatonic of mm. 27–28.

Indeed, the song's ending reinscribes the conflict between G♮ and G♭ as a separation of the white and black keys. As Raymond Monelle reminds us, "for Debussy, harmonic duality often hinges on white-key C and black-key F sharp."[320] At the end of the piece, the vocal line, which ascends through on a gapped white-key scale, recalls the piano's ascending bass line from m. 2. The (nearly) black-key ascending gesture from bar 2 has now been *tonally* realigned with the white-key collection. Thus, the black-key area—which accounts for the entirety of the texture in bars 27–28 and is associated by Debussy with the imagined fulfillment of the speaker's best hope—is opposed by the white-key collection of the final three measures. Debussy's ending thereby gives harmonic agency (that is, an actorial role) to the protagonist's imagining of the flight of his beloved.[321]

In his discussion of "Éventail," Wenk explains that "Debussy uses tonality to convey in music this idea of a virtual world, parallel to the real world, which can be entered by dissolving

[317] As Somer notes, the vocal melody in mm. 20–21 is limited to the white-key pentatonic collection. "Chromatic Third-Relations," 235. However, C is not sung until the downbeat of m. 22.
[318] Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 243.
[319] Despite the inclusive scale, the spelling of G♭ as F♯ and its repeated resolutions to G continue to imply a difference of function.
[320] Monelle, "Semantic Approach," 197.
[321] Wilson also argues that the ending of the piece "exposes the Princess's impending answer as yet another denial," but somewhat confusingly concludes that "the song ends as it begins, with a faint but enduring hope." Wilson, "Music and Poetry," 245–46).

the boundary which ordinarily separates them."[322] At the close of "Placet futile" however, the harmonic shift serves no such mediating purpose; rather, it highlights the distance between the speaker and his desired. The imagined ideal is a fiction. As Roe describes, "the interval outlining 'Princesse' is augmented to a major sixth (B–D), widening the distance between reality and representation in this 'futile entreaty.'"[323] However strongly the speaker desires otherwise, we understand that *she* will not be contained—for the white keys escape the bucolic reverie of bars 27–28; as the pitches evanesce, we realize that the princess's smiles will not be shepherded.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Placet futile"

The closural narrative undertaken in Debussy's music is vexed: it offers simple finality early in the work and imposes unexpected closure in the midst of the kinetic flow. As the words and the music are forced into close contact, one might understand the tension of unresolved musical closure as analogous to the speaker's attempt to corral the affections of his beloved. Thus, the conjunction of music and text at the close of this piece points to a tension between them. As we have seen, the black-key area associated with the speaker is decisively distanced from the white-key area associated with his imagining of the *princesse.* By contrast, in Mallarmé's poem these lines are closely associated: the image of Pan with his flute (line 13, mm. 27–28) is directly related to the symbol of the *berger* (line 14, mm. 32–34). The successful shepherding of the poetic intercuts (as discussed above) is interpreted as fictive by the musical setting.

This tonal "escape" therefore implies a double failure. As Robert S. Hatten explains, in its classical manifestations "the perspective of the pastoral is one of integrative, sturdily optimistic assurance, perhaps originating from earlier pastoral associations between nature and

[322] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 266.
[323] Roe, "Performative Voice," 93.

the harmonious natural order."[324] But Mallarmé's more modern pastoral pastiche depicts nature as figurative, diminutive, and entirely contained by the artifices of civilization (as in the painting on the fan; similarly, perhaps, the teacup demonstrates the reduced compass of the old gods). In the song, we are presented a world in which nature is alienated: any metaphor that invokes it is confined within the conventional object or banished to an unreachable tonal space. Not only does the *princesse* remain aloof, there is no enduring correspondence between human and nature: Arcadia cannot be recaptured. Albeit temporarily, only art can evoke a pastoral escape from reality.[325]

[324] Hatten, *Musical Meaning*, 83.
[325] In fact, Debussy's next move revives the Arcadian fan of "Placet futile": "Éventail" ("Fan")—the next song in the set—opens with an ascending black-key pentatonic scale.

Chapter 5. Real and Surreal:

"Spleen" (1887), "Recueillement" (1889), and "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" (1910)

In one sense, to use the term "surreal" in reference to Debussy's songs is to employ an anachronism. The surrealist art movement, while influenced by nineteenth-century French poets, was a product of the 1920s and 30s. Identification or analysis of musical surrealism has typically focused on composers setting surrealist texts. For example, in characterizing surreal music, Daniel Albright argues that

> for Poulenc, a true Saussurean (surely without knowing it), incongruities—whether between spectacle and music or between one aspect of music and another—are the prime generators of musical excitement, musical significance. In the theatre, every reinforcement of meaning leads, paradoxically to overdetermination, to weakening of meaning; every awareness of incongruity leads, at least potentially, to a strengthening of meaning.[326]

Similarly, Richard Taruskin finds that "as in Poulenc's more conceptual surrealism, Milhaud's functional surrealism depends as much on the ordinariness of the components as on the extravagance of their juxtaposition."[327]

However, by emphasizing the importance of "incongruities" and "juxtaposition," such descriptions of musical surrealism thereby reveal characteristics that are not necessarily dependent on an explicit connection with surrealist literature. Indeed, this strategy of Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion—"the irrational juxtaposition of realistic images"[328]—anticipates surrealist effects. That is, in given passages of "Spleen," "Je tremble en voyant ton visage," and

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[326] Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 305.
[327] Richard Taruskin, "The Cult of the Commonplace," chap. 10 in *Music in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume4/actrade-9780195384840-miscMatter-014008.xml.
[328] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "surrealism."

"Recueillement," the composer uses traditional musical materials (tonality, forms, genres), but in contra-stylistic combinations or contexts that both evoke and forestall expected functioning.[329] Debussy does not merely quote these traditional elements as dead artifacts. Retaining aspects of their expected functions, the composer also manipulates their functions in ways that contradict their essential identities. The resulting tension between "realistic" (that is, traditional) musical elements and "dream-like" contexts or combinations gives rise to disorienting, surreal effects.

In these songs, surreal effects arise in environments already destabilized by other types of ambiguities or conflicts. However, Debussy's use of the musical surreal is typically of limited duration: the strategy creates powerful moments, rarified and ultimately unstable. Juxtapositions of this type result in extreme—albeit, perhaps, not accentuated[330]—tensions that associate naturally with poetic evocations of the dreadful or sublime. All three of the poems examined in this chapter are examples of direct address (in "Spleen" and "Recueillement" Debussy highlights this aspect by making topical use of the more theatrical recitative-aria genre), and the strategy of the surreal also emerges as a tool of expressive force, particularly in "Recueillement" and "Je tremble en voyant ton visage."

[329] Debussy's musical surrealism accomplishes extreme effects on the small scale, but the strategy of mismatching thematic and tonal elements is also a hallmark of his approach to sonata form, as Ronald W. Rodman argues: "Debussy's innovation comes instead from his separating thematic development from tonal development and using developmental techniques in other sections." "Thematic and Tonal Processes in the Development-Reprise Forms of Claude Debussy, 1880–1905" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1992), 311.

[330] Often, Debussy's surrealist combinations are not signaled by other musical markers of incongruity.

Paul Verlaine's "Spleen"

As we will see, Verlaine evokes the instability of the speaker's mind in several ways. The poem creates a kind of distorted or inverse pastoral as the speaker's emotions discolor the landscape. The speaker's discomfiting imagistic juxtapositions, use of unwarranted linguistic extremes, and quick alternation of verb tenses further convey his imbalance and uncertainty. Finally, the poem's idiosyncratic form creates tension between its visual, aural, and semantic organizations, underscoring the fragility of the speaker's relationship and the distortions of his anxious mind.

Figure 5.1. Paul Verlaine, "Spleen" from "Aquarelles" in Romance sans paroles, *1874*

	Spleen		Spleen
1	Les roses étaient toutes rouges,	*a*	The roses were all red,
2	Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.	*b*	And the ivies were all black.
3	Chère, pour peu que tu te bouges,	*a*	Dear, for the least that you move,
4	Renaissent tous mes désespoirs.	*b*	All my despairs are reborn.
5	Le ciel était trop bleu, trop tendre	*c*	The sky was too blue, too tender,
6	La mer trop verte et l'air trop doux.	*d*	The sea too green and the air too soft.
7	Je crains toujours, —ce qu'est d'attendre!	*c*	I always fear, —what a thing to await!
8	Quelque fuite atroce de vous.	*d*	Some atrocious flight of yours.
9	Du houx à la feuille vernie	*e*	Of the holly with varnished leaf
10	Et du luisant buis je suis las,	*f*	And of the shining boxwood I am weary,
11	Et de la campagne infinie	*e*	And of the infinite countryside
12	Et de tout, fors de vous, hélas!	*f*	And of everything, except you, alas!

Rather than longing for rural retreat, the speaker is sick of the "infinite countryside" (lines 10–11). And, although nature is referenced in all three quatrains (paired couplets based on an abab rhyme scheme), its appearance is often unnatural. In the first two quatrains, expressive distortions reflect a world colored by the speaker's "despairs" and "fear" (lines 2 and 7,

respectively).[331] The commonplace of red roses in line 1 lulls the reader into a false sense of banal security, which Verlaine immediately juxtaposes with the macabre surprise of black ivy in line 2.[332] The contrast is disturbing, creating an uncertainty that the speaker's linking word ("and") does nothing to clarify.[333] It is left to the reader to puzzle out cause and effect. Why are all the roses in healthy bloom when the ivy is all dead? Is the scene itself nightmarish? Or is the (overwhelmed, untrustworthy) speaker conflating summer and winter scenes without verbal cue? Does the speaker's use of the hyperbolic "all" (lines 1–2, 4) describe a real scene of stark extremes, or reveal a totalizing perspective incapable of perceiving nuance?

Lines 5–6 introduce another kind of unease, as the speaker begins to complain about goodness—e.g., "the sky was too blue" and "the air was too soft." Does the speaker's use of "too" (lines 5–6) describe a scene of surreal distortions, or reveal a mismatch between his tortured mind and his mild surroundings?[334] In this context, the touches of synesthesia and personification (the sky was also "too tender," line 5) increase the sense of instability. Rather than suggest a sublime aesthetic sensitivity, the combination of touch, emotion, and sight appears to participate in the same unacknowledged slippage as the speaker's tenses.

The poem's temporal focus shifts without warning between the past, the anticipation of future events, and the present (see figure 5.2, below). Lines 1–2 and 5–6 belong to the past; using the past imperfect tense, their grammar implies past events with some duration. More ambiguously, lines 3–4 and 7–8—although stated in the present tense—are anticipatory, oriented

[331] As Linda Cummins writes, "the artificiality of the description in 'Spleen' [. . .] presents the poet's reaction to nature, or to an unnatural world of his own creation." *Debussy and the Fragment* (Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 81, PDF e-book, chap. 2.
[332] In English, the first two lines recall the old nursery verse "Roses are red / Violets are blue."
[333] Rather than using subordinating conjunctions, which tend to aid clarification, Verlaine prefers conjunctions that simply juxtapose various elements (e.g., "and" or "not"). Barlow, Dubosclard, and Reveyrand, Fêtes galantes *et autres recueils*, 79.
[334] Mylène Dubiau-Feuillerac refers to "the expression of excess of feelings" (l'expression de l'excès de sentiments"). "Verlaine/Debussy: La 'mise en sons' de 'Spleen,'" *Dix-Neuf* 17, no. 1 (April 2013): 58.

towards an unpredictable and uncertain future. In contrast, lines 9–12 are squarely in the present. Since these changes of tense are abrupt, their effect is disorienting, leaving it to the reader to attempt to reconstruct a logical narrative.[335] Compounding the confusion, Verlaine's rhyme scheme formally integrates these disparate tenses by parsing the poem into three quatrains (*abab*, *cdcd*, *efef*).

In "Spleen," Verlaine's changing temporal foci are associated with two other poetic aspects: narrative focus and emotional effect. In the first two quatrains, the past tense is associated with an impersonal narrative focus and with disorienting extremes. Meanwhile, the "anticipatory" present tense is associated with a personal narrative focus and with expressions of despair, fear, and fragility."[336] Verlaine's parallel alternations of temporal focus, narrative focus, and emotion thus link together the first two quatrains. His rhyme scheme underscores the same affiliation: end-rhyme *a* ("rouges" and "bouges" [quatrain 1]) share a vowel sound (ou) with end-rhyme *d* ("doux" and "vous" [quatrain 2]).

[335] As Christian Hervé describes, Verlaine uses "the temporal shift" (le glissement temporal) as a technology that "makes meaning" (fait le sens), in the sense that such a shift "requires [the reader] to *interpret*" (oblige à INTERPRÉTER). "Le temps dans les *Romances sans paroles*," in *Lectures de Verlaine:* Poèmes saturniens, Fêtes galantes, Romances sans paroles, ed. Steve Murphy (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007), 272, 274.
[336] Both Meister and Dubiau-Feuillerac note the speaker's alternating narrative focus. Meister (referencing Eléonore Zimmermann, *Magies de Verlaine* [Paris: José Corti, 1967], 84) calls it an alternation between "objective description" and "subjective sentiment." "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 207. Dubiau-Feuillerac calls it an alternation between "description" and "narration." "Verlaine/Debussy," 59. In contrast, both Samuel Hsu and Linda Cummins focus on the speaker's changing emotional focus. Hsu calls it an alternation between "statements of the 'spleen'" and "declamations of dissatisfaction and desire." "Imagery and Diction in the Songs of Claude Debussy" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1972), 133. Cummins explains that "'Spleen' is a structural representation, not just a telling, of the poet's emotional state," and calls the polarity an alternation between "boredom" and "fear and anxiety." *Debussy and the Fragment*, 81, PDF e-book, chap. 2.

Figure 5.2. Temporal focus and stanzaic form in Verlaine's "Spleen"

line	***rhyme***	***temporal focus***	***narrative focus***	***affects & emotions***
1	*a*	past	impersonal	disorienting extremes
2	*b*			
3	*a*	anticipatory—uncertain future?	personal	despair, fear, fragility
4	*b*			
5	*c*	past	impersonal	disorienting extremes
6	*d*			
7	*c*	anticipatory—uncertain future?	personal	despair, fear, fragility
8	*d*			
9	*e*	present	impersonal	disorienting extremes, weariness
10	*f*		personal	
11	*e*		impersonal	
12	*f*		personal	despair, fear, fragility

In contrast, in the third quatrain, there is no end-rhyme echoing of previous quatrains and—unlike the first two quatrains—quatrain 3 comprises a single sentence. Here the speaker ceases the alternation of tense, but doubles the speed with which he changes narrative focus.[337] Verlaine thus uses several means to unite the first two quatrains and differentiate them from the final stanza. The third stanza thus serves as the poem's *volta*: remaining in the present tense, the speaker finally folds his descriptions of nature into an argument. His weariness (line 10) is unusual in that it manifests in response to the landscape's distorted intensities. Whereas boredom should be colorless, here the opposite is true. Instead of reiterating his fears of abandonment, the speaker at last expresses his own devotion: regardless of the disturbing oddness or beauty of the world, only the beloved holds his attention.

Visually, the poet groups his octosyllabic lines into couplets, an arrangement that pulls apart the united quatrains and downplays the significance of the turn (*volta*) between octave and final stanza. Whereas the layout begins by following the alternations of tense, narrative focus, and emotional effect that pattern the octave, it continues throughout the poem, ignoring the

[337] Both Meister ("Interaction of Music and Poetry," 207) and Dubiau-Feuillerac ("Verlaine/Debussy," 59) also note this doubled pace.

significant changes of the last quatrain. These disagreements—creating a structural gridlock between visual layout, rhyme scheme, and semantic focus—express the speaker's emotional tension.

Debussy's Setting of Verlaine's "Spleen"

Originally composed between 1885 and 1887, "Spleen" is the final song in *Ariettes, paysages belges et aquarelles*, which were revised and republished in 1903 as *Ariettes oubliées*. As we will see, Debussy harnesses musical topics (including genre) to first establish and then undermine the music's reflection of Verlaine's poetic structures. For much of the song, the interaction of musical topic with harmony contradicts the latter's usual functioning, thereby confounding our sense of anticipation and continuation. These thematic and textural elements also distort tonal functioning and allow the setting to suggest conflicting tonal centers. In this way, the setting supports the dramatic performance of the pleading lover while simultaneously underscoring the relationship's fragility.

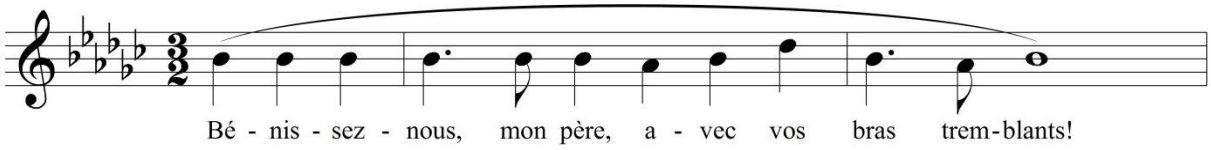
The Characteristic Motive

"Spleen" opens with a solo melody for the piano (motive W on the formal chart in figure 5.4, below) that evokes the lone fluting associated with the pastoral topic. Oscillating among pitches of a gapped, pentatonic subset (025), the melody keeps returning to its starting pitch, suggesting a B♭-axial pentatonic collection. In m. 3, the left hand enters the texture, adding a G♭–D♭ dyad that interprets the pentatonic melody in G♭ major.[338] Besides evoking the pastoral topic,

[338] Describing three different types of opening formulae in Debussy, Hepokoski cites "Spleen" as an example of the "monophonic opening." As he explains, a melody of this type "is often undular, returning at points to its initial pitch in a supple curve, and it generally implies a rather weak tonic, because of the use of pentatonicism, chromaticism, modality, gapped scales, or other such devices. This line leads directly into either chordal confirmation or nonconfirmation of the implied tonic." "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," 45, 46.

the melody also creates a telling intertextual allusion, sounding a variation on the "Bless us" melody from the doomed wedding in Chabrier's opera *Gwendoline*.[339]

Figure 5.3. Emmanuel Chabrier, Gwendoline*, act 2, scene 1, "Épithalme," mm. 52–54*[340]



Whether suggesting B♭ aeolian or G♭ major, the melody occupies an inverted "reality" in terms of the work's four-flat framing key signature. Although the pastoral tune pictorially evokes the countryside (consistent with the poem's imagery), the motive's harmonic location implies that it is removed or distanced from reality. On the other hand, in this case, the pastoral topic operates on one level of abstraction. It not only mirrors the natural elements in the poem, it also serves as a naturalizing, stabilizing force for this unlikely harmonic plateau. Over the course of the song, the constant recycling of the initial melody, buried in the piano as a leitmotive or *idée fixe*, continually returns to the tonally unreal, a place or time that can no longer be accessed (a reality countered or veiled by the placidity of the pastoral topic). Accompanying the settings of the poetic *present tense* (again, see figure 5.4, below), the cyclic return of this melody serves as an ironic temporal counterpoint to other, more progressive musical textures. While the voice assumes the persona of the pleading lover, the piano cycles continually through that unattainable

[339] Emmanuel Chabrier, *Gwendoline*, act 2, scene 1 ("Épithalame"). For this intertextual connection, Cummins (*Debussy and the Fragment*, 82, PDF e-book, chap. 2) credits Vallas, *Claude Debussy*, 66.
[340] Score excerpt based on Emmanuel Chabrier, *Gwendoline*, poem by Catulle Mendès, vocal score reduction by Emannuel Chabrier (Paris: Enoch Freres & Costallat, 1886), 211.

pastoral space, as if the subconscious strove to recapture an idealized time in which the lover were not so unpredictable.[341]

The Surreal Dominant Chord

In m. 4, the serenity of the opening bars is ruptured by a sforzando C^{m9}. Arriving via tritone, and without aural reference to the nominal tonic (F minor), this dominant harmony takes on an interruptive yet static quality. The entrance of the voice emphasizes this distortion. Not only does this implied dominant not resolve in the expected fashion, the vocal line in mm. 4–8 uses the leading tone as a reciting tone, counteracting the dominant's essential dynamism. Without anticipation, our sense of time's passage is dulled, and the manner of continuation is left unclear. Within the singer's surreal recitative, the "leading tone" implies no resolution—it simply delivers the neutral recitative. Thus topically altered, the non-functional use of this otherwise functional sonority is not merely "frustrated" in its lack of resolution, it is radically changed in its expressive implications, given the sense not of anxious anticipation, but of stasis. The surreal dominant harmony thus not only reflects the disturbing juxtapositions of Verlaine's poetry, but its failure to resolve to F minor until the very end of the song serves as a powerful block against the song's ostensible tonic, and thereby contributes to the sense of conflicting musical realities.

[341] Debussy's approach to "Rondeau" shows similar, "subconscious" repetitions of original thematic material. In her analysis of "Spleen," Dubiau-Feuillerac notes that the "the temporal perception is flustered, by this not foreseeable, irregular reminiscence of theme, as movements of energy more than development of thematic material." "Verlaine's poetry performed through Debussy's musical sounds: 'Spleen' in text and song" (lecture, Gresham College, April 12, 2012), http://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/part-eight-verlaines-poetry-performed-through-debussys-musical-sounds-spleen-in.

Figure 5.4. Music and poetry in "Spleen"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
piano motive / figuration	W			X					W (syncopation)		Z	X Y Z	X Z	X Z	X Z	X Z	X Z
harmony root/center	b♭ aeolian? pentatonic		G♭–C^{m9} (f: ♭II–V^{9})						b♭ aeolian?(b♭^{o}) G^{7}–C^{m9} (f: V^{7}/V–V^{9})					F♯^{7}	A^{7}	F♯^{7}	A^{7}
vocal line					reciting tone					descent		arp		descent		descent	
line					*1*		*2*			*3–4*				*5*		*6*	
quatrain					Quatrain 1									Quatrain 2			

18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34
W		app Y X	app	W Z	Z	W Z	Z	Z		W Z	Z	W				
G♭	b♭–e^{o}–+ (b♭? f?)	e^{o7}		B♭	D	B♭	d^{ø}7 (E♭?)		f–D♭^{7}	e♭–G♭	G♭^{7}	(chrom. +^{6}) C (f: +^{6}–V–				f i ?)
recit?	app	app	app	arpeggiated melody									arp			
7		*8*		*9*		*10*		*11*		*12*			*alas*			
Quatrain 2, cont.				Quatrain 3 (volta)												

Notes:

- **W**: solo "flute" melody
- **X**: dotted escape-tone figure first associated with the disruptive C-major harmony (m. 3)
- **Y**: dotted eighth followed by ascending chromatic 32nd notes
- **Z**: "heartbeat" syncopated triplet figure
- **app**: appoggiatura figure appearing first in the vocal line[342]
- **arp**: arpeggiated melody associated primarily with the vocal line

[342] John Robert Ringgold notes the inverted intervallic relationship between the piano's original escape-tone figure (G–A♭–E, mm. 4 and 20), and the vocal appoggiatura figure (F–E–A♭, m. 20). "The Linearity of Debussy's Music and Its Correspondences with the Symbolist Esthetic: Developments before 1908" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1972), 114–15. Dubiau-Feuillerac observes the retrograde appearance of the same notes: the piano's G–A♭–E in mm. 4 (right hand) and 20 (left hand) becomes (F–)E–A♭–G in the voice in m. 20. "Verlaine/Debussy," 71.

Vocal Genre

After the piano's introduction, Debussy's setting topically evokes a dramatic recitative-aria form that contends with Verlaine's quatrain structures. As we have seen, Debussy sets the first couplet (the disturbing, past-tense description of roses and ivy) to a monotone reciting tone in the voice with almost no piano accompaniment (mm. 5–8). Then, in m. 9, the voice takes on a lyrical, descending melody—a long-breathed sigh—that sets the second couplet (the despairing, present-tense description of the speaker's relationship). Also in m. 9, the piano reiterates the characteristic motive (W) in the left hand, filling out the texture with a throbbing, syncopated rhythm in the right hand. As he did in the introduction, Debussy moves from gentle B♭-pentatonic (aeolian?) to the dominant C (m. 12); G^7 (m. 11) replaces G♭ (m. 3) as the intermediate harmonic step. And, in contrast to the frozen leading tone of the opening, here the dotted, chromatic ascent in the piano (Y) bespeaks the desire, anxiety, and anticipation of the protagonist who sings of "all my despairs."

While Debussy's deployment of the characteristic motive mirrors the text in differentiating between past and present, he uses other musical elements to undermine the poem's structural divisions. We might expect the vocal line to return to the reciting-tone or recitative texture for the poetic return to the past tense, but mm. 14–17 recuperate the lush accompaniment and languid melodic descents first associated with the present tense (mm. 9–10). Thus, the setting creates two "pasts," the first extremely spare (reciting tone), the second overly luxuriant (aria). Debussy's allusion to this operatic form perhaps suggests a *performance* intended to convince the beloved to stay. As the setting unfolds, Debussy increasingly integrates musical elements associated with the past's persistent, surreal melancholia with those associated with the present's anticipatory "fear" and "despair." The setting of the final quatrain layers the

characteristic motive W (associated with the present, anticipatory tense) with the "heartbeat" figuration (Z on the form diagram; associated with the setting of the past tense in mm. 14–17). Eventually the entire texture is energized, as the ritual of summation is reversed—"these are the things I'm *not* interested in" (mm. 22–28) with climactic force (stringendo, molto mosso). After the dynamic and vocal arrival in m. 28, the vocal melody begins to fragment. Delaying the final word ("alas!") with a piano interlude, Debussy's dramatic setting once again subverts the poem's regular verse.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Spleen"

The song's opening harmonic salvo—the disruptive tritone opposition of G♭ and C—may be explained tonally as ♭II–V in F minor, the song's framing key signature. But in "Spleen," the nominal dominant does not serve as an easy conduit to the tonic. Instead, its jarring agitation (m. 3–4, and again in mm. 12–13 and 20–21) is associated with disruption and turmoil.[343] The leading-tone E is never directly resolved in its own register, except in m. 22, where its ascent to F is harmonized deceptively by a return to B♭. Indeed, the song repeatedly returns to plateaus stabilizing B♭ or G♭.[344] Without a clear resolution until the piano postlude, the putative dominant's link to its potential tonic is tenuous.[345]

Critical analyses of the song interpret the work's ending in a variety of ways. In Howat's proportional analysis, the work is a textbook example of expected proportional functioning: "all

[343] The setting's symbolic opposition of C and G♭ also appears (albeit enharmonically) in *Pelléas et Mélisande*: in correlation with Maeterlinck's opposition of darkness and light, Debussy uses C and F♯ as the musical poles of a "dark-light axis." Smith, "Tonalities," 125.

[344] B♭ (m. 9), F♯ = G♭ (m. 14), B♭ (m. 22), G♭ (m. 28). Although the voice clearly articulates an F-minor arpeggio in mm. 26–27, this chord is not supported as a tonic. Rather, the context subsumes the arpeggio into harmonies that suggest an imminent cadence to E♭—which is both realized and thwarted in m. 28. Such processes bespeak Debussy's indebtedness to Wagner's style, as we shall see.

[345] In analyzing the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, Robert Bailey describes Wagner's "*indirect* method of exposition, where certain fundamental tonal and motivic elements first appear by implication rather than by explicit statement." Robert Bailey, ed., *Richard Wagner: Prelude and Transfiguration from* Tristan und Isolde, Norton Critical Score (New York: Norton, 1985), 125. While the events of Debussy's "Spleen" can be understood in this light, the treatment of these indicative elements suggests that they are not, necessarily, reliable harbingers.

the important structural events are involved here, and the resulting scheme is virtually an architectural model [. . .]."[346] In contrast, Cummins understands the song as a fragment. As she explains, such works are not ambiguous, although they "appear ambiguous until enough information is revealed, or discovered, to make an identification." She argues that despite the uncertainty developed over the course of the work, the song's final cadence is inevitable, deriving its authority from the tonal system: "Debussy creates a sense of uncertainty and expectancy by tearing at convention while ultimately maintaining, even depending on, that convention."[347] While both Meister and Wenk understand the song to be in F minor, their descriptions of the ending focus on its emotional impact. Wenk describes the last chord as "the ultimate 'Hélas!'"[348] and Meister calls the ending "a sad little V–I cadence."[349] Their analyses thus frame the final resolution as a loss, an interpretation that downplays the chord's inevitability. Rider goes further, describes the ending as "unexpected," the result of a "surprising key change."[350] Thus, the song simultaneously supports a wide spectrum of interpretations, its ending perceived as both foregone conclusion and game upset.

Debussy achieves this effect by pitting musical topic and genre against traditional tonality. The off-tonic opening is believable as the governing tonic not only because of its rhetorical placement at the opening of the work, but also because of its recurring pastoral topic and the jubilant vocal aria of the final section (mm. 22–28). Then, although Debussy evokes the "home-key" dominant early in the piece, he renders the leading tone surreal, impossibly frozen as a static reciting tone. The work's conclusion is carefully crafted to maintain the surprise of F minor. Having fragmented the last poetic line by delaying its concluding word (the vocal pause

[346] Howat, *Debussy in Proportion*, 36.
[347] Cummins, *Debussy and the Fragment*, 85, PDF e-book, chap. 2.
[348] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 119.
[349] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 210.
[350] Rider, "Poetry and Persona," 338.

begins in m. 29 and lasts five and a half beats, the longest of the piece), m. 31 literally has the last word, while the piano simultaneously states an apparently final, quasi-Phrygian cadence to C major (as if ending on a Picardy third). This cadence is reiterated in echo in mm. 32–33. Because the last word ("hélas!") finally appears, and because so much emphasis (time, repetition) is given to this cadence, the subsequent sounding of F minor registers as something of a rhetorical surprise, as if constituting only a "forlorn, subdominant afterthought."[351] Indeed, the Phrygian cadence to C would be a stylistically acceptable conclusion—for example—for the slow movement of a Baroque suite. Given this allusion to earlier practice, even the tonal system itself does not require the F-minor chord that appears in m. 34. Thus, Debussy's rhetoric doubly determines the song's ending: it is both closural and disruptive.

A comparison with "Placet futile" shows strong parallels. While "Spleen" deploys musical topics against a heavily inflected tonal background, it is the interaction of topic and various harmonic collections that plays an important role in "Placet futile." Nevertheless, these two songs, differentiated as they are by their poets, and dating from different periods in Debussy's output, share striking similarities. Both poems present a one-sided pleading for a reciprocation of love, at the same time hinting that such a request may be futile. In both cases Debussy's music borrows from performative genres (dance and opera), lending a sense of rhetorical persuasion to portions of the texture or passages in the song. In counterpoint to these attempts at performativity, the pastoral topic, although setting the appropriate Arcadian or rural scene, also represents—in both songs—an inaccessible and deceptive space or time. The longed-for unreal is sounded by the black-key pentatonic piping of the flute. In both pieces, topical friction and the use of these topics to nuance and even subvert harmonic materials and tonal function result in highly contingent settings in which musical continuation or connection is

[351] Hatten, email message to author, December 19, 2017.

frayed or blocked. Here, the rhetoric of suggestion expresses a transfixing frustration. Yet, in "Recueillement" and "Je tremble en voyage ton visage" that rhetoric becomes a tool for wish fulfillment.

Charles Baudelaire's "Recueillement"

Written in 1861, "Recueillement" was added to the posthumous third edition of *Les Fleurs du mal.* The poem is an extended apostrophe addressed to "Douleur" ("Dolor"; also translatable as "Sorrow," "Grief," or "Pain") in which Pleasure, the Years, Regret, the Sun, and Night also appear as personified actors. Baudelaire uses these actors to create contrasts of scale and relationship, setting the "vast dimensions of time and space" against a "sense of closeness and peace."[352] A poetic inversion of values persists throughout; the speaker treats Dolor as a dear companion, welcoming Night while reviling Pleasure. Moreover, as Wenk suggests, "It is not simply evening which approaches; it is the Evening at the end of Life, an allegory for the death of sorrow."[353] Helen Abbott and David Evans argue instead that the poem "deals with nostalgia for a defunct poetics,"[354] and Dolor may be understood "as the anguish of the post-Romantic artist standing at the end of an era, sensing that a period of aesthetic stability may be over."[355]

[352] Fairlie, *Baudelaire*, 25.
[353] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 96.
[354] Helen Abbott and David Evans, "Music and Poetry at the Crossroads: Baudelaire, Debussy and 'Recueillement'," *Dix-Neuf* 8 (April 2007): 24.
[355] Ibid., 23.

Figure 5.5. Charles Baudelaire, "Recueillement," Les fleurs du mal, *1868*

	Recueillement		Contemplation [Meditation]
1	Sois sage, ô ma Douleur, et tiens-toi plus tranquille.[356]	*a*	Be wise, O my Dolor, and keep yourself more tranquil.
2	Tu réclamais le Soir; il descend; le voici:	*b*	You called for the Evening; it descends; here it is:
3	Une atmosphère obscure enveloppe la ville,	*a*	An obscure atmosphere envelops the town,
4	Aux uns portant la paix, aux autres le souci.	*b*	To some bringing peace, to others worry.
5	Pendant que des mortels la multitude vile,	*a*	While the vile multitude of mortals,
6	Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci,	*b*	Under the lash of Pleasure, that merciless executioner,
7	Va cueillir des remords dans la fête servile,	*a*	Goes collecting remorse in the servile festival,
8	Ma Douleur, donne-moi la main; viens par ici,	*b*	My Dolor, give me your hand; come this way,
9	Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher les défuntes Années,	*c*	Far from them. See leaning the dead Years,
10	Sur les balcons du ciel, en robes surannées;	*c*	On the balconies of the sky, in outdated garb;
11	Surgir du fond des eaux le Regret souriant;	*d*	[See,] Rising out of the depths of the waters, smiling Regret;
12	Le Soleil moribond s'endormir sous une arche,	*e*	[See]The dying Sun going to sleep beneath an arch,
13	Et, comme un long linceul traînant à l'Orient,	*d*	And, like a long shroud trailing toward the Orient,
14	Entends, ma chère, entends la douce Nuit qui marche.	*e*	Hear, my dear, hear the sweet Night that passes by.

[356] Briscoe's edition of the score shows a comma here (*Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, 26 and 145). Presumably this is a misprint. Baudelaire's period (Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, 2nd ed. [Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1869], 239) is reproduced in both the 1904 and 1917 Durand editions (Debussy, *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* (Paris: Durand, 1904), 27; Debussy, *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* (Paris: Durand, 1917), 26.

"Recueillement" employs the tension between "spleen" and "idéal" (or, despair and the ideal) that constitutes Baudelaire's binary poetic engine. As Fairlie explains, in Baudelaire's esthetic, contrast is the only means by which the ideal may be approached: "The sense of ecstasy is conveyed by setting it side by side with the reality from which it is formed and into which it falls back."[357] For example, lines 5–7 contrast to the rest of the poem not only in their "angry brutal outcry," but also in their "prosaic" quality. [358] That is, Baudelaire writes less beautifully or profoundly in these lines, deliberately allowing his words to embody the ugliness of the subject at hand.

The poem's ruminating meditation is performed as a recycling of syllables and sounds. Baudelaire's title, "Recueillement" (a cognate to "recollection"), is obliquely recalled in line 7 with "cueillir" ("collecting," as a physical act of gathering items together). Similarly, the "Années" of line 9 are dressed in "robes surannées" (outdated garb, line 10). The prefix sound "sur-" is heard several times: twice in line 10, and once to start line 11. End-rhyme ***a*** ("ile") is manifested three times with the same starting consonant: "ville" (3), "vile" (5) and "-vile" (7).[359] "Sous" from line 6 is approximated in "souriant" at the close of 11; and "Sois," the first word of the poem, returns as "Soir" in line 2. Baudelaire's diction sounds the susurrus he describes in line 13. We hear the shroud's rustle in his end-rhymes "arche" (12) and "marche" (14), and the final endearment ("ma chère," line 14) is all the more poignant for its murmuring echo of "marche."

"Recueillement" is a sonnet in alexandrine lines.[360] Yet despite the essential classicism of its poetic model, other aspects of the work complicate assumed relationships between sound,

[357] Fairlie, *Baudelaire*, 11.
[358] Graham Chesters, *Baudelaire and the Poetics of Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 137, 170.
[359] When preceded by the letter I, the French double L is typically pronounced like the English Y (as in "fille"); both "ville" and "tranquille" are exceptions to this rule.
[360] The French alexandrine is a poetic line with twelve syllables, divided by a caesura in the middle. Mallarmé's "Placet futile" shows a similar formal structure.

structure, and sense. Throughout the poem, lines in which the speaker addresses Dolor directly show small-scale fractures at odds with the alexandrine model. While most of the poem's lines exhibit the typical midpoint caesura (after six syllables), Baudelaire's punctuation creates additional caesuras in lines 1–2, 9, and 13–14.[361] Line 8 breaks the pattern most radically, dividing 3•5•4. All of these exceptions are associated with direct address, and arise in part due to the increased punctuation these addresses require.

Other, larger-scale irregularities increase towards the end of the poem, heightening the reader's sense of turmoil and movement. The treatment of rhymes within the octave is only somewhat unorthodox: Baudelaire uses *rimes croisées* (*abab*) rather than the *rimes embrasées* (*abba*) typical of the French sonnet.[362] The sestet is crisscrossed by several fault lines, each resulting from the structuring of different parameters. Its formulaic rhymes delineate a couplet followed by yet another quatrain (2 + 4). On the page, however, the visual division of the sestet suggests two balanced halves (3 + 3). The sestet's content indicates yet another asymmetrical division—that between seeing and hearing. In lines 9–12 the speaker mandates a list of sights, but in the final two lines of the poem he requires Dolor to listen. This sensory shift is made more emphatic by the conjunction "and" at the beginning of line 13, as if the increasing rhetorical pressure of the list's culmination necessitates a formal division (4 + 2) that opposes the rhyme scheme (2 + 4).

As the poem unfolds, sentence structures begin to conflict with stanzaic structures. The first sentence is coterminous with the first line. As such, it exhibits a kind of perfect containment,

[361] The punctuation of line 1 has both initial and midpoint caesuras, dividing 2•4•6. In contrast, the punctuation of line 2 indicates both midpoint and terminal caesuras, dividing 6•3•3. The enjambed sentence ending in line 9 creates a stronger initial caesura, but there is also a (weaker) midpoint caesura (2•4•6). Similarly, the punctuation of lines 13 and 14 also creates two caesuras (1•5•6 and 2•2•2•6 or 2•2•8, respectively).

[362] Théodore de Banville's exemplars of the regular French sonnet follow the rhyme scheme *abba abba ccd ede*. *Petit traité de poèsie française* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Écho de la Sorbonne, 1872), 171–72. Roger Pearson references Banville's description in *Unfolding Mallarmé: The Development of a Poetic Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 157.

mirroring the speaker's demand that Dolor keep calm. Similarly, the first quatrain is linguistically isolated through punctuation: it ends with a period. All the other stanzas are more open, their burgeoning sentences bridging the gaps implied by the visual delineation of sections. While the move between octave and sestet triggers an expectation of the *volta* (the sonnet's turning point in both structure and sense), the punctuation instead creates the poem's least definitive stanza break (merely a comma); indeed, the boundary between the tercets is stronger (a semicolon). This sense of inconsistency between poetic stanzas and punctuation suggests an increasing theatricality of performance, as if—after the propriety or containment of the first quatrain—the poem's visual and formal divisions are blurred or distorted by the speaker's rhetorical delivery.

Although the *volta* is structurally minimized by a lack of definitive punctuation, it is nevertheless made imagistically literal by the speaker's imperative ("come this way / Far from them"), and performatively visceral by the enjambment that pulls the reader from line 8 into line 9. Of both audiences—the reader and Dolor—the poem demands a physical turning away from the multitude encountered in the octave. The unexpected force of this enjambment into the sestet appears to imbue the following sentence with a heightened kinesthesia. This increased sense of motion manifests in the sentence order, where verbs precede nouns (lines 9 and 11). As if participating in this syntactical torsion, the poem's actors also move dynamically through space. The years lean down from above, and regret surges upward. Just as these characters arc in opposite directions, so the sun dies in the west and night trails like a shroud towards the east.

The semantic and grammatical rhythms in the sestet are choppy, despite its even lines. The rhythmic unrest seems to stem from line 8, which is radically asymmetrical. After completing the enjambed sentence flowing over from line 8, line 9 crams in yet another

imperative, giving the impression of haste. Then line 10 expands on the same image, slowing the semantic tempo.[363] Lines 11 and 12, which are separated by a visual stanza break, share similar semantic duration: each presents a single image, and back-to-back they increase the sense of speed. The final two lines (this time joined not by rhyme scheme but by the shift from visual to aural sense), again slow the tempo, drawing the elaboration of a single image over lines 13–14. Thus, despite the invocation of pastness and temporal closure—the end of yet another day, the end of life—the sestet describes a scene of turmoil and motion underscored by its own structural and rhythmic conflicts.

In contrast, under the speaker's attentions, Dolor becomes increasingly passive or controlled. The speaker addresses Dolor primarily in imperatives, serving as her insistent guide from start to finish. Yet, as Fairlie notes, this is "coaxing" and "intimate" language, like the language used to console a child.[364] First, the speaker urges tranquility (line 1); Dolor had been demanding, but now her wishes are fulfilled (line 2). Then, at the break between octave and sestet, the speaker takes physical leadership; hand in hand, he guides Dolor away from the crowds. Dolor's larger motions now under his control, the speaker turns his attention to directing her gaze (lines 9–12). Finally, the speaker demands that she listen (line14). The speaker thus narrates a progression of persuasion: he describes Dolor's transition from indulged demands to self-mastery to walking hand-in-hand with him; he directs her sight and, yet more intimately, her hearing.

Debussy's Setting of Baudelaire's "Recueillement"

Written in 1889, "Recueillement" is the fourth of Debussy's *Cinq poèmes de Charles Baudelaire*. Whereas the poem's increasingly chaotic interpretation of its classical form is

[363] Lines 9 and 10 are also paired by their shared end-rhyme; they constitute the sonnet's only *rime suivie*, a consecutive pair of lines linked by end-rhyme.
[364] Fairlie, *Baudelaire*, 25.

countered by the speaker's increasingly persuasive control of Dolor, the rhetoric of Debussy's setting is not so linear. At the very outset, Debussy's thematic materials establish a topical field that also presents the song's fundamental harmonic ambiguity. Although the song first evokes a theatrical vocal genre, the composer then uses his characteristic motives to articulate a rondo structure that contends with Baudelaire's poetic form and merges uneasily with the recitative/aria patterning. In two critical passages, the composer uses motivic influences to subvert expected tonal functioning, creating musically surreal effects. Similarly, the ending simultaneously suggests both the containment of chaotic or unresolved elements and, impossibly, an overflow of music that escapes its structural confines.

Characteristic Motives

The piano introduction presents two characteristic motives that recur throughout the work: the syncopated arpeggio ("W," on the formal diagram, below) and the "Douleur" figure ("X"). In m. 1, the syncopated arpeggio ascends from C♯ in open fifths. In m. 2, Debussy continues the broken-fifths arpeggio, but contrasts the spare sonority of m. 1 by substituting an extended-tertian harmony on E.[365] Despite its major-minor sonority, the E^{13} does not resolve as a dominant.[366] Instead, it serves as a non-functional, chromatic-mediant embellishment of the original C♯: the block simply repeats with variation in mm. 3–4.[367]

[365] Without similarity of opening textures or melodies, the juxtaposition between C♯ minor and E major harmonically anticipates the structural and expressive opposition of C♯ and E that Debussy used five years later in the *Prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune"* (1894).

[366] Later, in mm. 62–63, E will receive its own dominant and appear as a quasi-tonic. (Note the missing natural sign, a misprint, for the lowest E in mm. 63–64 of Briscoe's edition.)

[367] Debussy often employs major-minor sonorities in apparently non-functional oscillations (for example, in the opening bars of "L'ombre des arbres" and at the beginning of the third stanza of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau"), and such potential dominants are often resolved later in the work. But in "Recueillement," E *never* resolves as a dominant. Rather, it most often functions as an expansion of tonal focus—first embellishing C♯, then suggested as a secondary harmonic center. As we will see, the oscillatory pattern of these first measures anticipates the harmonic syntax of other passages (e.g., mm. 12–14 and 56–58). By establishing its first chord as the more stable of the two oscillating harmonies, the characteristic motive forges a template that enables Debussy to create surreal stabilizations later in the work.

Figure 5.6. Music and poetry in "Recueillement"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
motive	W		W	~~X~~	~~X~~	~~X~~		X		X′	X′	Z		Z	
***form**, (meter, harmony)*	**A** (4/4; 4 sharps)											(D♯)			(C) †
line							*1* *be calm*					*2* *night falls*			
stanza							Quatrain 1								

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
Y		Y		Y	Y		Y		Y		Y								(W)
B (3/4; "C"?)																			
		3 *obscure atmosphere*			*4* *peace/worry*					*5* *vile multitude*			*6* *pleasure's whip*			*7* *remorse*			
Quatrain 1, cont.										Quatrain 2									

36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66
W		W	~~X~~			… X″? tri	tri	tri	~~X~~ tri	~~X~~ tri	tri	tri	X	~~X~~	~~X~~	~~X~~	whole tone melody			Z		Z		X′ W		Y … X′ X′ W …				
A′ (4/4; 4 sharps); includes vocal refrain!					†	**C** (3/4; continue 4 sharps)														(3/4; "C")				**A″** (4/4; 7 sharps)					
	8 *come this way*			*9a* *far from them*		*9b* *see the years . . .*			*10* *. . . leaning*				*11* *regret rising*				*12* *sun falling asleep*			*13* *like a trailing shroud . . .*				*14* *. . . hear sweet Night*					
Quatrain 2, cont.				Tercet 1													Tercet 2												

Notes:

W: syncopated arpeggio (whole-note oscillation)

X: the "Douleur" motive

~~**X**~~: kernel or fragment of the "Douleur" motive

Y: neighbor-note variant of the "Douleur" motive

tri: melodic trichords, often shared between voice and piano

Z: portato (whole-note oscillation)

† This measure belongs to both sections (in m. 15, elision; in m. 41, transition continuing harmony from A′)

Shading highlights returns of rondo refrain (section A) and motive Z

Aspects of this opening characteristic motive are also found in two of Debussy's 1903 *Estampes.* Like "Recueillement," the first *Estampe* ("Pagodes") also begins in 4/4 with a low downbeat followed by a syncopated arpeggio that omits the chordal third. Without duplicating the syncopation heard in "Recueillement," the second *Estampe* ("La soirée dans Grenade) matches "Recueillement" pitch for pitch in the first five notes of its ascending arpeggio. Programmatically, these two *Estampes* show similarities to "Recueillement" through generalized references to Asia (the "pagodas" in the title of the first *Estampe* and "the Orient" in line 13 of "Recueillement"), and to the evening (the "evening party" in the title of the second *Estampe* and the "evening" in line 2 of "Recueillement"). These intertextual echoes, both aural and programmatic, suggest that the music at the opening of "Recueillement" participates in Debussy's topical evocation of orientalism and the nocturnal.

Figure 5.7. Claude Debussy, "Pagodes," Estampes, *no. 1, mm. 1–3*[368]

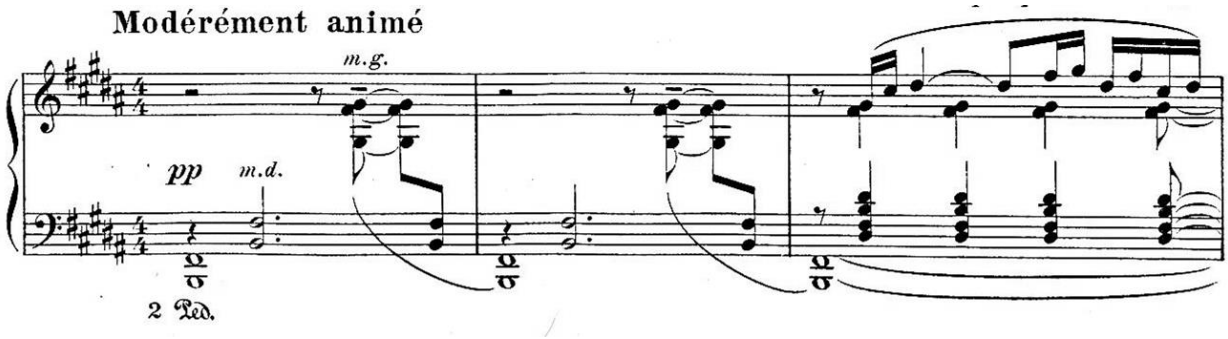
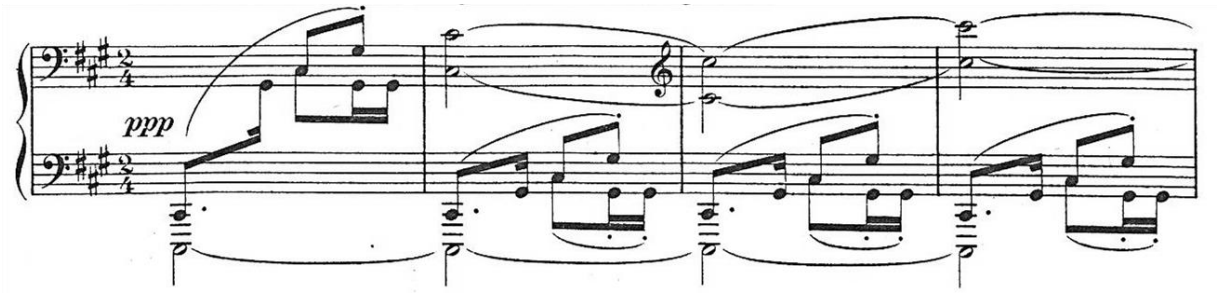


Figure 5.8. Claude Debussy, "La soirée dans Grenade," Estampes, *no. 2, mm. 1–4*[369]



[368] Debussy, *Estampes*, 1.
[369] Ibid., 9.

Later in the song, the whole-note harmonic oscillations of Z are similarly associated with the night and the East. In m. 12 the harmonic succession begins stepwise rather than with thirds. Instead of a syncopated figuration, the sustained chords are distinguished with bell-like portato articulations. Z first accompanies the singing of line 2 ("You called for the Evening; it descends; here it is"), which the voice intones on a wavering reciting tone. In mm. 56–59, Debussy recalls Z for the setting of line 13 ("And, like a long shroud trailing toward the Orient"). In the poem, the referent of line 13 is not clarified until near the end of line 14: it is *Night* whose passage sounds like a trailing shroud. However, because the song layers line 13 with the motive that earlier accompanied the singing of evening's arrival (mm. 12–15), Debussy's setting (in mm. 56–59) implies that the shroud is related to nightfall, even before the word arrives. Z also plays a critical role as a marker of formal articulation. And, as we shall see, its unexpected interaction with tonal materials becomes implicated in the creation of surreal effects.

The "Douleur" figure (X) emerges out of the introduction's syncopated arpeggios. In its kernel, the "Douleur" figure is an ascending half step, originally from G♯ to A.[370] This G♯–A motive first appears in m. 4 as a retardation to an embellishing harmony, vii^{o7} of E. The figure's chromatic retardation, layered harmonic context, and diminished sonority imbue it with a tension and unrest that contrasts with the relative equilibrium of the opening bars.[371] In its developed form (first stated definitively as a six-note melodic motive by the piano in m. 8), the figure begins and ends with the same ascending half step (here, transposed to D–E♭).[372] This longer form of the motive emerges simultaneously with the first singing of "Douleur" (mm. 7–8). The

[370] Referencing Deryck Cooke's *The Language of Music* (London: Oxford University press, 1959), Wenk notes that minor seconds are associated with pain (*Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 96). Abbott and Evans point out that the half-step from G♯–A is also an element of the Tristan motif ("Music and Poetry," 27).

[371] Extending what could have been a balanced 2 + 2 pattern in the piano groupings, it is as if the inherent striving of a new impetus stimulates the variation of the syncopated arpeggio, and the "Douleur" figure emerges out of this disturbance.

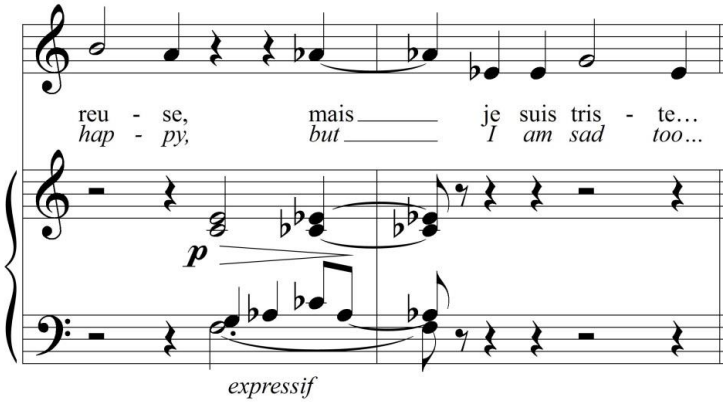
[372] This rhythmic profile and pitch pattern is actually established first in m. 6, where it is also obscured by a mid-motive change of voice and register.

half-diminished chord on the downbeat of m. 8 and the ascending chromaticism of the leitmotif (although not fully chromatic here) evoke the *Tristan* prelude.[373] Thus associated with pain, unrest, and Tristanesque yearning, the "Douleur" figure pervades the work. It repeats throughout the A section until m. 12, and is subsequently referenced—in full or in variation—in each major section of the piece.

Genre and Form: Contradicting Poetic and Musical Expectations

In its most important formal divisions, Debussy's setting does not follow the poem's stanzaic patterning[374] or even consistently reflect the relative weights of its punctuation. For example, we might expect the most important musical breaks after bars 24 (the end of the first quatrain) and 52 (the end of the first tercet), and perhaps after bar 39 (the end of the octet—although Baudelaire closes this section with a comma, thereby indicating continuation). In fact, there is no musical break after the end of the octet, and the ends of the first quatrain and first tercet are marked only by small musical changes.

[373] As we have seen, Debussy's 1892 setting of "En sourdine" also references Wagner's *Tristan.* Similarly, in act 4, scene 4 of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Debussy enharmonically quotes the Tristan chord as Mélisande begins to sing "mais je suis triste" ("but I am sad"), the intertextual allusion underscoring the tragic reversal of her earlier claim to be happy ("je suis heureuse"). Score excerpt based on Claude Debussy, *Pelléas et Mélisande: Drame lyrique en 5 actes et 12 tableaux*, libretto adapted from Maurice Maeterlinck, score for voice and piano, English trans. Henry Grafton Chapman (Paris: Durand, 1907), 255.



[374] As Abbott and Evans write, Debussy "deconstructs the sonnet form on a stanzaic level." "Music and Poetry," 29. This conflict with the stanzaic form is a contrast to "Le jet," in which Debussy's musical sections follow the poem's quatrain and octet divisions.

Instead, Debussy exaggerates the poem's theatrical qualities, using musical form to underscore Baudelaire's alternation between direct address and description. The song thus unfolds as a rondo; Debussy sets the direct addresses to Dolor as recurring piano refrains[375] and the poetic descriptions, in turn, as episodes. Remarkably, although there is no poetic refrain per se, Debussy also uses a vocal refrain melody in A and A′ (the vocal melody of A″ differs). The song's principal musical sections are, therefore: (A) the direct address to Dolor and the fall of evening, (B) the description of the "obscure atmosphere" and the "vile multitude," (A′) the second direct address to Dolor, (C) the sights "far from" the crowds, and (A″) the sound of evening and the final direct address to Dolor. Debussy's deployment of Z thus suggests an arch form: at the beginning of the piece, the motive follows the first statement of the refrain (mm. 12–15); at the end of the piece the motive precedes the refrain's return (mm. 56–59).[376]

Besides contending with Baudelaire's sonnet form, Debussy's rondo also contravenes musical expectations. In a classical rondo, the materials of the refrain are typically more stable than the materials of the episodes. Debussy's "Recueillement" subverts this expectation with elements of recitative/aria patterning. In the poem, the speaker repeatedly interrupts the flow of the line by using interjections to re-invoke his audience.[377] It is this halting style that Debussy exaggerates in his refrains: when the speaker addresses Dolor directly, Debussy uses *recitativo accompagnato*. In contrast, the episodes, which set the descriptive passages, sound like arias.[378] That is, although the vocal setting remains syllabic throughout the work, the music of the episodes generally conveys the continuity, fluency, accompanimental style, and melodic shapes

[375] As Parks writes, "The reprise immediately invokes the poem's beginning, as the speaker's attention returns to the companion addressed there." *Music of Claude Debussy*, 102.
[376] Double arch patterning also appears in Debussy's setting of "De fleurs" (1893).
[377] For example: "ô ma Douleur" (line 1), "Ma douleur" (line 8), or "ma chère" (line 14).
[378] In the middle of line 9, the speaker continues to addresses Dolor directly, commanding "Vois" (See). Yet Debussy does not treat this as a direct address—the music clearly belongs to the episode, not the refrain. Perhaps this is because this line does not re-name the speaker's companion, and its smoother prose thereby shifts emphasis to the poetic images.

that are characteristic of song rather than recitative. Debussy's meters underscore this difference: refrain passages are notated in quadruple time, whereas episodes are in triple meter.[379] In addition to choosing an inherently unstable genre for the refrain (i.e., the recitative), the refrain also undergoes significant variation. In particular, in the final refrain—discussed below—the vocal melody adopts the lyrical style that had previously belonged only to the episodes.

Episodes: Reversal of Poetic Coercion

Made similar by their comparatively aria-like textures, the episodes nevertheless show contrasting musical rhetoric. The first episode is more energized and coercive, pushing toward a Romantic climax. The second episode is more meditative and discursive, allowing a freer flow of diverse images. This contrast reverses the rhetoric of the poem, in which the speaker increasingly directs the behavior and attention of his Dolor. Although setting multiple poetic images (lines 3–7), the first episode (mm. 16–35) is made cohesive through Debussy's large-scale increase of intensity. Despite diminuendos in mm. 20 and 23, Debussy's use of sequence,[380] octave doubling, crescendo, animando (m. 29), and an overall rise in pitch from mm. 16–32 drive the listener from one musical idea to the next. This musical "collecting" ("va cueillir," line 7) is opposed to the musical separation of the images in the second episode.

In the second episode (mm. 41–55; lines 9b–12), Debussy emphasizes the *change* of each poetic image, as in a montage. The passage describing the "Years" features melodic trichords

[379] There is a corresponding, albeit less consistent correlation between formal section and vocal phrase length. In the refrains, the vocal phrases are typically four bars long (often divided into two subphrases); in the episodes, the vocal phrases are more typically three bars long.

[380] This sequence recalls the "Douleur" motive, in that both use an ascending tetrachord that (at least initially) highlights a half-step at its apex. Apart from this, their profiles vary, but have in common an emphasis on looping or repetition. The original "Douleur" motive begins and ends with the same half step. Y starts with a repeating whole step, and ends with a cambiata loop. This sequence is occluded by the apparent misprint in m. 17 of Briscoe's edition: F♯–G♯–G♯–A (*Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 1, 146). Both the 1904 and 1917 Durand editions show mm. 17 and 19 as identical in the piano part: F♯–G♯–E–F♯. Debussy, *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* (1904), 28. Debussy, *Cinq poèmes de Baudelaire* (1917), 26. In her comparison of the two manuscript versions of the score, Rider also shows the melodies of mm. 17 and 19 as identical. "Poetry and Persona," 212.

that are often shared between the voice and piano (sometimes stated in contrary motion), and at times obliquely recalls the "Douleur" motive (mm. 42–48).[381] "Regret," on the other hand, references the "Douleur" turn figure more obviously and foregrounds triplet rather than duplet figuration (mm. 49–52). The music for the "dying Sun" uses neither of these motives; the passage's moving lines belongs entirely to the whole-tone scale (mm. 53–55).[382] The contrast to the first episode is especially clear in Debussy's performance markings: these musical scenes shift without urgency. Diminuendos at the end of "Years" and "Regret" (mm. 46 and 52, respectively), as well as a ritardando at the end of "Sun" (m. 55), suggest a fading of each scene, allowing attention to drift to the next image without hurry. Thus, the second episode's attenuated connections—that is, the variety of its motivic ideas and the repeated ebbing of energy between its phrases—contributes to the song's rhetoric of suggestion by dulling specific expectations. Since we cannot predict what will happen next, the general sense of possibility multiplies, generating a mounting pressure toward musical change, a preparation for the surreal transformations of the final refrain.

[381] G♯–A–C in the top voice of m. 4. Unlike the song's development of other motivic ideas, ~~X~~ undergoes the variational play that is often associated with the techniques of freely atonal music. In the second episode, the vocal line first states the "leaning" motive in ascending quarter notes, G♯–B–C♯ ("Vois se pen-[cher]," m. 42); the piano plays it at the same time, in retrograde (C♯–B–G♯). In bar 43 the piano plays a transposed version of the retrograde in the high soprano register. The original retrograde version is repeated in the piano exactly in bar 44. Then in bars 45–46, the piano repeats a more distant version—a mirror inversion of the retrograde whose intervals are contracted (Fx–G♯–B). The voice joins in, first with a voice exchange in bar 45, then in parallel with the piano in bar 46. In 47–48 the piano returns to a transposed version of its retrograde form (A–G–E♭).

[382] Parks, in his detailed analysis of "Recueillement," argues that "Debussy consistently associates the whole-tone genus with death and with that which is mysterious, beyond mortal control or comprehension" (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 101). However, his analysis of this phrase points to full-texture materials that shift between the whole tone and the diatonic, instead of noting the use of whole-tone collections for the melodic lines (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 95).

Final Refrain

The final refrain layers the syncopated arpeggio with the "Douleur" motive, and presents the "Douleur" motive in stretto.[383] More importantly, the piano texture is no longer recitative-like—as the earlier refrains had been—but instead embodies the dramatic aria, which had previously been the mode of the episodes. Even the vocal line adopts a more melodic style, ascending to dramatically emphasize "marche," which falls off with an octave descent (mm. 62–64). This striking displacement of style gives attention to the speaker's imperative to "hear" (line 14), which begins this final refrain. By substituting aria for recitative, and by mixing multiple thematic elements, Debussy gives the listener, in a sense, more music than he's led us to expect for the refrain. The unexpected aria of this final refrain quiets speech and stills the action, providing instead a luxurious excess of sensory beauty. Thus, while A″ closes the rondo form by returning—as expected—to the refrain's motivic elements, this passage is both more and less stable than expected. It is more stable (and, therefore, more traditionally refrain-like), because here Debussy abandons the fragmentary, recitative style. It is less stable (and, therefore, less refrain-like), because this aria significantly disrupts patterning Debussy established earlier in the song.

Ambiguity and Delay

"Recueillement" is bookended by C♯, yet, as we have seen, the first characteristic motive oscillates between C♯ (no third) and E^{13} (mm. 1–4). Debussy recalls this root relationship at the start of the second episode (E^{9}–$C♯^{7}$, mm. 41–42) and, most emphatically, at the song's final

[383] After stating a variant of the "Douleur" figure in mm. 60–61 (Fx–G♯–E♯–Fx–[G]–G♯), the piano presents the motive in stretto in mm. 62–65. In m. 62, the tenor begins (Fx–G♯–E–E♯–F♯), only concluding to the expected G♯ in m. 64. Meanwhile (m. 62, beat 3 through m. 64), the piano's upper voice begins a statement of Y (C♯–D♯–[D♯]–C♯–D♯–E–F♯–D♯–E). While the rhythms have been simplified (liquidated) and augmented, the intervallic pattern matches exactly the version heard in bars 21–24 ("To some bringing peace, to others worry"). This motive overlaps with the "Douleur" motive in m. 64 (E–F♯–D♯–E–E♯), bringing the song to a close.

cadence (E–C♯, mm. 63–65).[384] Over the course of the song, Debussy's functional resolutions appear to confirm both keys in turn.[385] At the retransition into the second refrain, d♯$^{ø6/5}$ resolves quasi-plagally to C♯ (mm. 35–36). Near the close of the song, however, B^{9} resolves quasi-authentically to E$^{(7)}$ (mm. 62–63). Most of the time, however, Debussy repeatedly recomposes the behavior and resolutions of the "leading tones" B♯ and D♯ in ways that defer closure, thematize deceptive motion, or subvert expected tonal functioning. Similar to his approach in "Spleen," Debussy uses topical elements to stabilize both leading tones, creating surreal, multiply determined musical passages that lend the setting a mysterious expressive power.

As described above, D♯ first appears in mm. 4–5 supporting the nascent "Douleur" figure as an embellishing dominant function (d♯^{o7} over E). The sonorities in bar 6 are G♯$^{4/3}$ and b♯^{o7}, which points toward a possible return to C♯ (although the b♯^{o7} is aurally indistinguishable from the previous d♯^{o7}). When the voice enters at the end of m. 6, its melody arpeggiates upward through the same unstable dominant (D♯–F♯–A). In the middle of bar 7, the piano punctuates the voice's fragmented recitative with another d♯$^{o4/3}$, suggesting a return to E rather than C♯. But the B$^{4/3(♭5)}$ in m. 8 (F–B–E♭–A) offers yet another harmonic harbinger of E. None of these harmonic continuations are realized. Instead of resolving D♯ (E♭) to E—as the b♯^{o}7, d♯^{o}7, and B$^{7(♭5)}$ might have implied—the vocal line walks it downwards: D♯ to D♮, and then C (m. 10). Here is a clear musical depiction of the speaker's demand that Dolor calm herself (line 1): instead of allowing this musical agitation to move upward to its goal, Debussy lets it subside into quietude.

[384] This ending is echoed by the final cadence of Debussy's 1904 "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau": E^{9}–C♯ (m. 31).
[385] In this, the song shows the influence of Wagner's *Tristan*, with its "'double-tonic complex.'" Described by Bailey, the design "pair[s] together [. . .] two tonalities a minor 3rd apart." Bailey, *Prelude and Transfiguration*, 121.

Thematizing Deceptive Resolution

Indeed, the move from D♯ to C becomes a recurring harmonic motif. In mm. 14–15, D♯ major shifts via chromatic mediant to C major, as if to ♭VI in the key of E major. As David Code writes, "after the halting, fragmentary setting of the first line, the second—'You called for the night; it descends; here it is'—settles into a crystalline chord of arrival like a gift."[386] Thus stabilized by the continuity of the new aria texture, the pedal C, the ostinato bass, and the repeated motive (Y), C (mixolydian) is given its most extended stretch in the piece (mm. 15–20).

Thereafter, the motion from D♯ to C recurs in both episodes, as the process of this particular deceptive motion becomes an expected norm and subtle formal cue.[387] In the first episode, line 6 ("Sous le fouet du Plaisir, ce bourreau sans merci") is set with an ascending repetition in the bass of D–D♯–E (mm. 29 and 30) that arrives on B^{13} in bar 31. In the second episode, line 13 ("Le Soleil moribund s'endormir sous une arche") is set with an ascending repetition in the bass of F–G–A (mm. 53 and 54) that arrives on B^{13} in bar 55. Bars 31 and 55 even show similarities in the piano's voicing and octave register. Both dominants are resolved deceptively to C at the beginning of the subsequent phrases: to C^{9} in bar 32 and to a longer-lived C in bar 56. These phrases are opposed in their collections (the first emphasizes the chromatic, the second the whole-tone scale) and in their poetic imagery and dynamic energy (the first, accompanying Pleasure's lash, is marked "*poco cresc. e animando*"; the second, accompanying the dying Sun, is marked *pp*). The repetition of this particular deceptive motion serves as a marker in Debussy's formal syntax. Each of these B^{13} cadences functions as a penultimate pause: each ushers in the last phrase *before* the recurrence of the rondo's refrain. The repeated

[386] David J. Code, *Claude Debussy* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 44.
[387] Bailey describes the deceptive motions of Wagner's *Tristan* prelude as "central hallmarks of the new system." Bailey, *Prelude and Transfiguration*, 118. Debussy's use of this language in "Recueillement" further demonstrates this work's connection to Wagner's style and, in particular, to the *Tristan* prelude.

resolutions to C also continue to stabilize the unstable leading tone (B♯, in the framing key of C♯), a critical step in Debussy's construction of surreal musical effects.

Surrealist Transformation

Despite the vocal melody's early and striking reversal of D♯ down, via D♮, to C (mm. 9–10, discussed above), the piano immediately instates a chromatic-mediant oscillation that repeatedly counters D♮ with D♯ (mm. 10 and 11 move kaleidoscopically between two major-minor harmonies, D7 and B7). Here the repetition of the "Douleur" motive continues the sense of anguished striving—harmonically, the listener assumes, towards E. This expected continuation is again forestalled, this time by a chromatic-mediant shift from B^9 to D♯ major on the downbeat of m. 12, as Debussy gives consonant support to the D♯ leading tone of E. The nature of the portato motive (Z) lends it further stability, such that the E^9 in bar 13 is heard as a neighbor-chord *embellishment* rather than a resolution. The earlier D♯ is transformed entirely. No longer striving, it is asserted as a point of balance, serving as both the arrival from 11, and the beginning of the next phrase (12–15).

Although grounded on a different note, the second appearance of Z (mm. 56–59) evokes the same confounding logic. Its focal point—C—arrives as the deceptive resolution of the previous harmony. Even more pointedly, in both the piano's bass and in the vocal line, B (in m. 55) resolves upward by semitone to C (in m. 56). Once again, the whole-note oscillation (Z) imputes stability to the first of its two harmonies.[388] Yet, for all its ostensible stability, this plateau also acts as a leading-tone prolongation (since C is enharmonically B♯): the C♯-major

[388] The harmonic oscillation (C–B♭–C–a♯) is more uniform than in the first appearance of Z. The final A♯-minor harmony, which finishes the word "Orient," is indeed marked: there is no other minor triad so clearly stated in the entire piece.

cadential 6/4 arrives directly after, in measure 60.[389] These two passages thus occupy a rarefied musical space. Although the leading tone is by definition transitory and unsustainable, here it acquires a surreal stability. To paraphrase Magritte's surrealist text for *La trahison des images*, it is as though Debussy asserts, "this is not a leading tone."[390] Both passages are doubly determined: their harmonic and thematic contexts suggest interpretation as points of resolution and arrival, and at the same time, their harmonic platforms imply powerful tendency tones. Transfixed, these surreal leading tones imbue the music with a forceful incongruity that draws rarefied rhetorical attention to Night's passing.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Recueillement"

Debussy's setting for "Recueillement" harnesses musical uncertainty and conflict in several parameters. Besides maintaining a tonal ambiguity between C♯ and E, Debussy combines a theatrical musical genre with a (conflicting) rondo form. Both of these contend with the structure of Baudelaire's sonnet. Yet these conflicts make possible the surreal surfeit of music that appears in the final refrain, an aria-like conclusion that simultaneously fulfills and breaks its formal contract. (The passage's aria-like qualities lend it stability, an attribute that conforms to traditional expectations for the musical texture of a refrain. But, because this texture is a *contrast* to the song's previous refrains, the passage actually disrupts listener expectation, countering the refrain's traditional function as a return to familiarity.) Just as in the song's two previous instances of the musical surreal, the tension of this incongruity lends unusual expressive power

[389] In m. 61, C^7 precedes the $G♯^7$ dominant, emphasizing this enharmonic link. At the same time, Debussy melodically re-articulates the ambiguity between C♯ and E. In the vocal line, the descending press of "ma chère" (E♯–E–D♯) in mm. 60–61 ends on the leading tone of E. This gesture directly recalls the setting of "plus tranquille" (D♯–D–C) in bars 9–10, where the line ends on the leading tone of C♯.

[390] Titling his painting of a pipe *La trahison des images* (The Treachery of Images), René Magritte captioned the work with the phrase "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" (This is not a pipe).

to Night's processional. Indeed, this conjured expressive force effects the transformation of the "Douleur" motive itself, its half-step resolution no longer striving but triumphal.

Tristan l'Hermite's "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" ("Le promenoir des deux amants")

The text for Debussy's "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" is an excerpt taken from Tristan l'Hermite's seventeenth-century poem "Le promenoir des deux amants."[391] As James Shepard notes, the poem's "happy combination of idealized nature and love," together with its "dazzling rhetorical display, gives us a mannerist work *par excellence.*"[392] The work's quatrains consist of enveloped couplets (*rimes embrasées: abba*, *cddc*, etc.) of eight syllables each. Establishing an aural echo on the larger scale, a *rime pauvre* (echoed final consonant) connects the framing couplets of the first and third quatrains ("visage"/"naufrage" and "privilège"/"neige," respectively). This subtle echo helps delineate the three-stanza poetic excerpt as an independent entity.

Figure 5.9. Tristan l'Hermite (c. 1601–1655), "Le promenoir des deux amants," stanzas 22–24 (lines 85–96)

1	Je tremble en voyant ton visage	*a*	I tremble at seeing your face
2	Flotter avecque mes désirs,	*b*	Floating [wavering] with my desires,
3	Tant j'ai de peur que mes soupirs	*b*	I am so afraid that my sighs
4	Ne lui fassent faire naufrage.	*a*	Might shipwreck it.
5	De crainte de cette aventure	*c*	Out of [for] fear of this event
6	Ne commets pas si librement	*d*	Don't commit so freely
7	A cet infidèle élément	*d*	To this inconstant element
8	Tous les trésors de la Nature.	*c*	All the treasures of Nature.
9	Veux-tu, par un doux privilège,	*e*	Do you want, through a sweet privilege,
10	Me mettre au dessus des humains?	*f*	To place me above humanity?
11	Fais-moi boire au creux de tes mains,	*f*	Let me drink from the cup of your hands,
12	Si l'eau n'en dissout point la neige.	*e*	If water does not melt their snow.

[391] The poem was published in 1633 as part of the larger collection *Plaintes d'Acante*. Sandrine Berregard, *Tristan L'Hermite, "héritier" et "précurseur": Imitation et innovation dans la carrière de Tristan L'Hermite* (Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr, 2006), 226.

[392] James C. Shepard, *Mannerism and Baroque in Seventeenth-Century French Poetry: The Example of Tristan L'hermite*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, ed. Carol L. Sherman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93.

Aqueous imagery provides the connection between the excerpt's two conceits.[393] Stanzas 1 and 2 use seafaring metaphors (floating, shipwreck, inconstant element, treasures), as "the sighs of the lover threaten to destroy the beauty's reflection."[394] Stanza 3 represents both a continuation of the imagistic thread—that of water—and an important shift. The second conceit inverts the container imagery, depicting the beloved's hands as a vessel from which the speaker might drink. Despite these significant changes of both container and scale, the risk is not gone. Since the drink of water might melt the beloved's "snowy" hands, the favor threatens a change of state in their relationship.

Belonging to the genre of the amorous entreaty, the excerpt develops instability as a crucial theme. Roger Guichemerre writes that in stanza 22 (that is, the first stanza of the song text) "one finds […] the poetry of the ephemeral, the gracefulness of fragility."[395] The speaker "trembles" (line 1), the visage of the desired is "wavering" or "floating" (line 2), and risks possible "shipwreck" (line 4). Every other line of the first stanza triggers a reinterpretation of the balance of power: whereas lines 1 and 3 depict the speaker's fears, lines 2 and 4 show that the beloved is at risk. Enjambments between lines 1–2 and 3–4 enhance the drama of the shifting power-play until the rhyme between "visage" and "naufrage"—which sonically links the beloved to disaster—settles the debate. In the second stanza the speaker warns the beloved to be more guarded, and not to entrust herself to the "inconstant element" of his desires (line 7). Even as the speaker asks for a sign of her affection that would "place [him] above humanity" (line 10), he

[393] The complete poem gives this scene context: having invited Climène to sit with him beside the fountain (stanza 14), the speaker then tells her that if she bends her head over its waves, she will see the most charming thing in the world (stanza 17). The theme of reflection was established even earlier in the poem. The speaker references Narcissus (stanzas 2 and 19), and explains that the pool is one of the faun's mirrors (stanza 3). Tristan l'Hermite, *Les amours : La lyre; Les vers héroïques; Les heures de la Vierge; La Mariane; Le parasite; Lettres amoureuses; Le page disgracié*, 3rd ed., Collection des plus belles pages, ed. M. Remy de Gourmont (Paris: Mercure de France, 1909), 51–56.

[394] Roger Guichemerre, *Quatre poètes du XVII^e siècle: Malherebe—Tristan L'Hermite—Saint-Amant—Boileau* (Paris: Sedes, 1991), 100; les soupirs d l'amant risquent de détruire le reflet de la beauté.

[395] Ibid.; on retrouve ici la poésie de l'ephèmére, la grâce de la fragilité.

notes *her* vulnerability: this favor may undo her, may "melt the snow" (line 12). Throughout, the speaker appears to emphasize his worry for her: ironically, he advises her not to rely on him, even as he presses his suit.

Debussy's Setting of Tristan l'Hermite's "Je tremble en voyant ton visage"

Dating from 1910, "Je tremble" is the third song in Debussy's *Le Promenoir des deux amants* (the first two songs set other excerpts from the same poem). In "Je tremble," the composer creates dissociation between poetry and music, and between different musical parameters. These disconnections participate in building a song that explores the theme of instability and the conditional, despite its pastoral frame. Indeed, Debussy thematizes pastoral retreat, repeatedly delaying tonic arrival with gestures toward the subdominant.[396]

The setting treats desire in two ways. First, the composer makes an associative link between the instability caused by desire ("flotter avecque mes désirs") and the use of $\flat\hat{3}$—a connection that is developed both poetically and musically later in the song. Second, by misaligning the harmonic and melodic parameters of the B section, Debussy undermines the work's dynamic climax. Such undercutting, which is another hallmark of the pastoral,[397] is not unique among Debussy's designs. Typically, however, the undercutting is dynamic rather than harmonic.[398] In the B section of "Je tremble," although melody, rhythmic diminution, tessitura, and dynamics continue to build, harmonic arrival is deferred. The section's degree of directedness—without harmonic breakthrough—is a critical feature of the driving, agitated rhetoric of the song's interiors. Finally, Debussy sets the poem's turn from admonition to request with an impossible conflation of thematic and harmonic events. This surreal interaction provides

[396] The preoccupation with subdominant space bears similarity to Debussy's strategy in "Rondeau." However, while the setting of "Rondeau" highlights its retrogressions with simultaneous rhetorical breaks, the setting of "Je tremble" maintains a more fluent texture.
[397] Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures,* 56.
[398] See, for example, Debussy's setting of "Le jet d'eau."

a moment of disorientation that is performative in its indirection, while rhetorical in its force. Nevertheless, the setting's conclusion thwarts interpretive certainty, since the arabesque maintains its wavering identity.

One of the important gaps between music and text in this song is that the instability and danger emphasized in the poetry is not dramatized at the beginning of the song. Rather, its opening music is placidly pastoral. Debussy marks the movement "Rêveusement lent" and indicates "doux et très soutenu dans l'expression" for the vocal entrance. The entire first section statically prolongs the D♭-major tonic, which is inflected by a B♭ that sounds as a pastoral added sixth throughout the first six measures. Even when the D♭–A♭ pedal is temporarily suspended and chromatic motion intrudes (mm. 7–8, doubled in sweetening parallel sixths), tension is quickly dissipated through a scalar descent that follows a traditional bass-line formula (I^6–$V^{4/3}$–I –$V^{6/5}$, mm. 8–10). Yet the return to harmonic calm makes an uneasy setting for line 4, which describes shipwreck ("naufrage"). By creating this gap or friction, Debussy suggests a kind of distance: perhaps the beloved is absent and the speaker is simply narrating a daydream without any real danger or possibilities, or perhaps the speaker is strategically contradicting his dramatic language with a gentle delivery. By destabilizing the relationship between text and music, the setting creates an environment that more easily fosters surrealist musical effects.

The Arabesque

In "Je tremble," Debussy's contrasting characteristic motives situate the music topically and help articulate the poem's structure. Their deployment implies outward wavering contrasted with—or perhaps, masking—inward desire. In addition, the first characteristic motive participates in the construction of the musical surreal.

Assigning one poetic stanza to each section, Debussy's setting is in ternary form (ABA′). The song's first characteristic motive, a pastoral arabesque (X on the form diagram), is the thematic marker of the A sections. The arabesque first sounds in the upper register of the piano in m. 1. Thus established at the outset of the piece, its three-note fragment recurs four times within the first six measures. The arabesque is absent throughout the B section (mm. 11–15) but pervades the final passage. At the very close of the work, the triplet is liquidated into sixteenths and recomposed as an undulating line (mm. 22–25).

Despite its initial introduction as a pastoral marker, Debussy's deployment of the arabesque also creates a dissociated effect. It accompanies poetic descriptions of wavering (mm. 4–6), wishing (mm. 16–19), and the conditional (mm. 22–25). In the first section, Debussy achieves the dissociated effect by maintaining the motive's intervals as invariant, even when these pitches clash against the vocal line and the piano's harmonic support. Note, for example, the arabesque's E♭ in measures 4 and 5, which sounds against the E♮ in the voice and the sustained E♮ of the piano's sonority. In the third section, Debussy repeats the arabesque against a backdrop of changing harmonies (mm. 16–18 and 22–25; m. 19 is the one exception). The even-higher register of the ostinato in this passage further enhances its dissociated, ungrounded quality. This pastoral fragment, by floating above the texture without consistent harmonic connection, can correlate with the dreaminess of tenuous reality and enhance a sense of the surreal.

The Double-Dot

The arabesque's figural foil is the double-dotted rhythmic motive that first appears at bar 6 (Y on the form diagram).[399] This rhythmic pattern suggests a delicate increase of animation

[399] There is a dotted (not double-dotted) rhythm at the end of the first measure, which perhaps prefigures motive Y.

and evokes the complex artifice of the French courtly tradition[400] rather than the more serene, natural, and idealized realm of the arabesque. In "Je tremble," the double-dotted motive is usually associated with ascending passages (the bass-line's chromatic ascent in mm. 6–8, the voice's scalar ascent of a tenth through mm. 11–14, and the bass-line's repeated whole-tone ascent in bars 20–21). This association increases the motive's correlation with heightened energy, effort, and urgency.

Debussy uses the double-dotted motive when setting text in which the speaker expresses fear of disaster, or makes a direct request (mm. 6–15 and 20–21).[401] These poetic ties explain the motive's appearance in all three sections of the piece. Arising in the middle of the A section (m. 6), the double-dotted motive continues to sound throughout the entire B section. It also recurs in the middle of the final A section (mm. 20–21), where it is sandwiched by the arabesque motive. Rather than giving sound to the shifting of power in stanza 1 (which alternates from line to line between speaker and beloved), Debussy dramatizes the embedded rhetoric of the speaker's request. The dreamy arabesque frames the work, while the riskier and more insistent double-dotted motive is hidden within, characterizing the middle passages.

[400] However, inverted pedal points in the A sections and Debussy's marking "souple" (m. 11) distance this rhythmic figure from the ceremonial pomp of the French overture.
[401] The one exception is bar 17. Here the top voice of the piano repeats the melody from bar 1, but the dotted figure in beat 3 is now given a double dot.

Figure 5.10. Music and poetry in "Je tremble en voyant ton visage"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
motive	X			X	X	X–Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
harmony	D♭: V^7	I^{add6}			i^{add6} – I^{add6}		$V^{6/5}$/ii–chrom 6^{th}s–I^6		$V^{4/3}$–I	$V^{6/5}$ (HC?)
form	**A**									
line			*1*		*2*		*3*		*4*	
rhyme			*a*		*b*		*b*		*a*	
stanza			Stanza 1							

11	12	13	14	15
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
I^9? V^9/IV?	♭VII^9? IV^9/IV? V^9/♭III?	I^9? V^9/IV?	♭VII? G♭: IV–vii^{o7}	
B				
*5**	*6**	*7**	*8**	
c	*d*	*d*	*c*	
Stanza 2				

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
X	X–Y	X	X	Y	Y	X′	X′	X′	X′
G♭: I	ii–V^7	vi	IV^9? F♭:V^9(HC?)	F♭: I–ii–iii^7	D♭: ♭III–iv–V^7	ii^7	V^7		I
A′									
9		*10*		*11*		*12*			
e		*f*		*f*		*e*			
Stanza 3									

Notes:

- **X**: arabesque
- **Y**: double-dot figure
- The vocal melody for each poetic line in stanza 2 is about a measure in length, but these are not set uniformly *within* measures; line 6 is slightly shorter and line 8 is slightly longer

Instability: The Sigh

In addition to his use of the dissociated arabesque, Debussy also explores the theme of wavering or instability using the sigh figure, the D♭–C♭ oscillation, and the enharmonic E♮/F♭ pair. Debussy's text-setting for the B section is compressed (just one measure for each poetic line instead of two as in the A sections), as if the speaker's delivery is rushed. Against a rising melody in the voice, the piano repeats sigh figures whose first notes are accented non-harmonic tones (B♭–A♭ in mm. 11, 13, 14, 15; and A♭–G in mm. 12, 14).[402] The piano part in this section grows increasingly rhapsodic, aided by the accented dissonances. Its sigh-filled melody is performed in a higher register and doubled at the octave and fourth. In this passage, Debussy uses a generically romantic accompaniment style, with sustained low notes in the bass providing the foundation for thick, chordal figuration in the middle voices. A crescendo in bar 13 leads to the mezzo forte in bar 14, the work's climactic point. Imbued with this increasing intensity, the agency of the wavering sigh motives proves melodically irresistible. Although the voice and piano parts in bars 11–13 are independent and highly differentiated, in measure 14 the voice joins the piano in a series of unison sigh figures that are simultaneously planed by the piano in parallel thirds and octaves ("[tré]-sors de la Nature"). Thus, the unfolding relationship between voice and piano foregrounds the sigh figure's melodic agency in coaxing a sympathetic resonance from a previously unrelated line, as symbolic of a lover's successful suit. But, as discussed below, this motivic alignment is undermined harmonically, rendering the passage expressive of desire rather than victory. The musical drama involves a poetic text that urges caution, and its climactic point celebrates the beloved's beauty, not any new step in the pair's relationship.

[402] These same sigh figures are continued in the piano part of the final section (B♭–A♭ in m. 17, B♭–B𝄫 in m. 19; A♭–G♭ in mm. 16 and 18). The voice ends with this same figure, now a suspension: B♭–A♭ in m. 24.

Although the poem's narrative continues to build until the speaker states his request (line 11), Debussy's setting apparently downplays that later moment (m. 20). The seemingly misaligned narratives of poem and music suggest a strategic purpose. Indeed, because Debussy's understatement is implicated with the construction of musical surrealism (as we shall see), its indirection is linked directly to its rhetorical power.

Instability: The D♭–C♭ Oscillation

In the B section, Debussy uses a harmonic oscillation to break from the static tonic field of the first section. This D♭–C♭ oscillation (mm. 11–14) provides an embodiment of the "inconstant element," which the speaker warns about in line 5. Like the treacherous nature of the speaker's rhetoric, the oscillation suggests conflicting possibilities for harmonic continuation. Because Debussy returns to $D♭^9$ in bar 13, the initial move from $D♭^9$ to $C♭^9$ (mm. 11–12) could be read simply as a neighbor-chord decoration of the D♭-major tonic plateau. Or, understanding the $D♭^9$ as an applied dominant to G♭ (as V^9/IV), the move from $D♭^9$ to $C♭^9$ might be understood as an evaded, quasi-deceptive cadence in G♭. Indeed, the vocal part in bar 12 outlines the G♭-minor triad, giving some support to this interpretation. When the oscillation repeats, it is varied: in mm. 13–14 Debussy writes $D♭^9$–C♭, with no extension of the C♭-major triad. The simple C♭ harmony then participates as the subdominant (IV/IV) in a functionally syntactic progression, moving to f^{o7} (vii^{o7}/IV) and finally to G♭ (IV) in m. 16. The $C♭^9$ itself suggests yet another syntactic continuation, which Debussy exploits later in the piece (to be discussed below).

Instability: F♭/E♮ As a Marker of Desire

Debussy thematizes the enharmonic equivalents F♭/E♮ as a marker of desire, and this pitch functions variously as a modal inflection (leading-tone to F) and as a harmonic plateau. We first hear this note in measures 4–5, as the voice sings "floating with my desires" while sinking

from F to E♮.[403] In this context, the enharmonic function implies ♭$\hat{3}$ as the music exchanges its D♭-major tonic for the parallel minor, expressively foreshadowing the tragedy described by the speaker's warnings. When this note resolves upward by half-step at the beginning of the second phrase, it fulfills its magnetic,[404] leading-tone function, thus realizing the implication of its spelling as ♯$\hat{2}$. The piano's bass line echoes this chromatic ascent in mm. 7–8, with its final step rising from E♮ to F. The mercurial shift from harmonic depression to striving ascent reflects the modus operandi of the poem's speaker, who uses images of instability and disaster to advance his amorous entreaty.

Both of the previous interpretations of the D♭–C♭ oscillation ignored the potential dominant function of the extended-tertian C♭ chord in bar 12. While this apparently decorative harmony is "corrected" to a simple triad at its second appearance in bar 14, the chord's suggested dominant function is realized in the song's final section. As we have seen, Debussy establishes the subdominant key (G♭) toward the close of the B section, and this key remains in effect through the return of the A section (which begins in m. 16). Debussy does not dissolve G♭ until m. 19, when he adds an unexpected lowered seventh to its subdominant. In fact, with the added ninth (D♭) in both voice and piano, this chord recalls the extended-tertian structure of the harmony from m. 12. Arriving without preparation late in the phrase, and pointing toward a harmonically distant key area, the C♭^{9} imposes a wrenching dominant that resolves to the following F♭ major.

Setting the speaker's suggestion of a favor that would "place [him] above humanity" (line 10), the abrupt transmutation of IV into V thus contradicts the pastoral qualities of the A section.

[403] The piano's inner voice traces the same shift.
[404] Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 88.

Its rhetorical surprise not only disrupts the unmarked flow, it negates the stability of both local and global subdominants (C♭ and G♭, respectively). Here it resolves, for the first time, according to tonal expectations, ushering in the F♭ harmonic platform on which the speaker makes his request ("Fais-moi boire aux creux de tes mains," mm. 20–21). The music has moved outside the diatonic frame and into the chromaticism of desire, reconnecting with the association F♭ accrued in the song's first phrase. The brief duration of this key area underscores its instability: after only five beats, Debussy sounds $A♭^{7}$, marking the turn toward tonic.

Pastoral Escape and the Surreal Conflation of Times

Using V^{7}/IV as a tonic substitution is a traditional expansion device associated with the inauguration of closing passages and is indicative of a retrospective turn.[405] In this song, Debussy initiates the maneuver early, using it as a harmonic bridge between sections rather than to introduce a coda. In fact, the setting repeatedly employs similar techniques, evading closure via subdominant substitution. Such cadential evasions—which implicate the subdominant space—are markers of pastoral retreat. As we shall see, Debussy aligns these harmonic moves with the speaker's evocations of fear and caution.

At the start of the B section (m. 11), the $A♭^{6/5}$ that closed the A section resolves to $D♭^{9}$ (V^{9}/IV). Debussy thus forestalls tonic closure by signaling a turn to the subdominant. This first gesture toward the subdominant sets the text "De crainte" (line 5), and the setting mirrors the implied emotion, harmonically shying away from closure. As the song continues, the composer reiterates and reconceives this move. As described above, the oscillation of the B section (mm. 11–14) delays the arrival of the subdominant key area by a retrogressive move from V^{9}/IV to

[405] As Robert S. Hatten writes, "a move to V^{7}/IV at the point where we expect a final cadence can launch a retrospective coda. The reversal of the leading tone to the seventh of V^{7}/IV aptly symbolizes not only the avoidance of closure but also the compensatory move to the subdominant side that is more relaxed and hence more suitable for reflection and reminiscence." "The Troping of Temporality in Music," in *Approaches to Meaning in Music*, ed. Byron Almén and Edward Pearsall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 63.

IV/IV (m. 14). The vocal line embroiders an ascending scale from D♭4–F5 (mm. 11–14) but, as if thwarted by subdominant substitution, never completes the ascent to G♭ (locally, $\hat{1}$). The lack of harmonic conclusion and melodic arrival in this passage performs the speaker's advice in lines 6–8 ("Ne comments pas si librement / A cet infidèl élément / Tous les trésors de la Nature").

Indeed, when F♭ arrives as the root of a chord in its own right, it does so at the culmination of a stuttered series of descending perfect fifths that has haltingly traced a path from D♭ to G♭ (m. 16), and via C♭ (m. 19) to F♭ (m. 20). The fractured nature of this chain downplays its sequential nature. Instead, it twice emphasizes the subdominant as a substitute for, and delay of, the tonic: the motion to G♭ delays closure to D♭; the emphasis on C♭ delays closure to G♭. As such, these harmonic gestures build musical content by means of a reiterated pastoral escape. This is also true of the complete form of the poem, which spends almost its entire first half (the first thirteen of twenty-eight stanzas) describing scenery which is the natural milieu of the birds, the faun, and the pagan gods.

Debussy employs the tactic a third time in bars 21–23. The $A♭^{7}$ dominant that arises at the end of m. 21 does not resolve immediately to D♭. Instead, mm. 22 and 23 prolong the supertonic. The voice sings D♭ and F ($\hat{1}$ and $\hat{3}$) against the piano's $e♭^{M9}$ sonority, giving emphasis to the extended tertian partials that allow the harmony to be interpreted as a deceptive substitute for tonic. This retrogressive or deceptive progression sets the poem's conditional phrase "Si l'eau n'en dissout point," and Debussy's harmonic rhetoric also hedges, delaying the final cadence with a final predominant substitute.[406]

[406] In the penultimate bar, Debussy sounds first $a♭^{7}$, then $A♭^{7}$, repeating the evocation of the G♭-major pitch collection before confirming D♭ in m. 25. (The move from $a♭^{7}$ to $A♭^{7}$ was also rehearsed in mm. 20–21.)

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Je tremble": Surreal Indirection

The music of bar 16 implies three conflicting events. First, it represents an arrival, in that it establishes the subdominant key area that was both heralded and forestalled throughout the B section. Second, it completes a delayed departure, finally realizing the move away from tonic. Third, this music performs a thematic *return*: after its absence during the B section, the arabesque reappears, thereby signaling the start of A′. Harmonically, closure to IV has been the expected goal since the start of the B section, but it is not achieved until the start of the following section. On a formal level, we expect thematic return to coincide with a *return* to tonic. Instead, it is at this moment that Debussy's setting *departs* from it decisively. This simultaneity of arrival, departure, and return creates a surreal conflation of temporal perspectives at the moment of subdominant realization. Yet the juxtaposition of these events is ostensibly unmarked by the song's other parameters: there is no dramatic rhetorical break, and nothing surprising about the moment's dynamics or tessitura.

This disorientation coincides with the speaker's turn from admonition to request—the same request toward which the complete poem also builds. In a sense, Debussy's surreal musical moment anticipates the eventual result of this request, the swoon that occurs outside its borders.[407] As such, its expressive force powerfully enhances the indirection of the speaker's mannerist language. Nevertheless, Debussy's choice of poetic excerpt is telling. While the next stanza of Tristan l'Hermite's poem makes clear that the speaker's request achieves stunning success, the composer ends before any conclusion is determined. Debussy's setting thus keeps several possibilities alive. Does the framing arabesque—and return to D♭ major—stymie the implied teleology of the poetic fragment, relegating the entire entreaty to the realm of wishful

[407] In the complete poem, the next line reads "Ah! I cannot do more [I can't stand it], I swoon" (Ah! je n'en puis plus, je me pâme). L'Hermite, *Les amours*, 56.

thinking? Is the speaker still "trembling," just as he was when we first heard the arabesque? Alternately, does the arabesque's participation in the construction of the surreal succeed as a means of persuasion? Is its rhythmic liquidation (mm. 22–25) the result of its success (the treacherous "melting" of the poetic excerpt's final line), or its failure (disintegration)? The sweetness of the song's ending ("aussi doux que possible," m. 22) and the high register of the arabesque (now placed "above humanity," mm. 22–25) sound the speaker's wish as fulfilled. Yet—as with the ambiguously uncertain endings of the "En sourdine" settings—this conclusion remains indeterminate: its result may be real or only imagined, true in the present moment or only in the dreamed-of future.

Chapter 6. The Elusive Past:

"L'ombre des arbres" (1885), "De rêve" (1895), and "Les ingénus" (1904)

With "L'ombre des arbres," "De rêve," and "Les ingénus," Debussy sets three poems that explore the subject of the remembered past. In all three poems, the writers manipulate tense to great effect. "L'ombre des arbres" shows the reach of the past as the landscape of the present appears to reflect the speaker's personal history. Similarly, in "De rêve" and "Les ingénus," both final lines describe the speaker's "soul" still deeply affected by his memories. There are differences as well. While the tone of "De rêve" is symbolic and nostalgic, that of "Les ingénus" is self-aware. "L'ombre des arbres" uses changes of tone as a variational technique in order to create a symbolic, self-reflective link between nature and human experience. Where "L'ombre des arbres" highlights memory as both repetition and skewed reflection, "De rêve" laments inarticulacy, retaining only the lingering traces of the past. In contrast, "Les ingénus" points to the still-resonant effect of words uttered long ago. Spanning almost twenty years of the composer's oeuvre, the songs are very different in many aspects of their styles. Yet, there are similarities in Debussy's settings, as well: all three of these songs employ multiply directed harmonies and conflicting formal cues as important components of their rhetoric.

Paul Verlaine's "L'ombre des arbres"

Figure 6.1. Paul Verlaine, "L'ombre des arbres" from "Ariettes oubliées," Romances sans paroles*, 1874*

	L'ombre des arbres		The shadow of the trees
	"Le rossignol qui du haut d'une branche se regarde dedans, croit être tombé dans la rivière. Il est au sommet d'un chêne et toute fois il a peur de se noyer." —*Cyrano de Bergerac*		*"The nightingale who from high on a branch looks at himself below, believes he has fallen into the river. He is at the summit of an oak and at the same time he is afraid of drowning"* —*Cyrano de Bergerac*
1	L'ombre des arbres dans la rivière embrumée	*a*	The shadow of the trees in the misty river
2	Meurt comme de la fumée,	*a*	Dies like smoke,
3	Tandis qu'en l'air, parmi les ramures réelles,	*b*	While in the air, among the real branches,
4	Se plaignent les tourterelles.	*b*	The turtledoves complain.
5	Combien ô voyageur, ce paysage blême	*c*	How much, o voyager, this pale landscape
6	Te mira blême toi-même,	*c*	Mirrored your pale self,
7	Et que tristes pleuraient dans les hautes feuillées,	*a'*	And how sadly were weeping in the high leaves,
8	Tes espérances noyées.	*a'*	Your drowned hopes.

Paul Verlaine's "L'ombre des arbres" was published in 1874 in *Romances sans paroles*. The title of this collection, originally given to a group of pieces for solo piano (e.g., Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, later, Fauré's *Romances sans paroles*) implies that music may be *more than* itself, that music could make text superfluous, that a single instrument could conjure two. In contrast, Verlaine's use of the same title for a collection of poems seems to imply an oxymoronic denial of literature's linguistic essence in favor of music, pantomime, or silence. As Barlow, Dubosclard, and Reveyrand argue, the title indicates Verlaine's "refusal of 'discourse,' [his] search for a poetry almost 'beyond words,' that would be only soul-song, breath, murmur."[408]

[408] "l'expression 'sans paroles' désigne sans doute le refus du 'discourse,' la recherche d'une poésie presque 'au-delà des mots,' qui soit seulement chant de l'âme, respiration, mumure." Barlow, Dubosclard, and Reveyrand, Fêtes galantes *et autres recueils,* 17–18.

Spatial Inversion, Misperception, Skewed Reflection

The epigraph's themes of spatial inversion and misperception are both embodied in the image of skewed reflection. Despite de Bergerac's objective tone, Jacques Neefs explains that the theme of watery reflection "hinders the possibility of defining the objects involved, bathing them in a perception which is committed to illusion."[409] This nightingale is perfectly safe; yet, having misunderstood its true position, it believes that it is in constant danger. Ironically, the bird creates its own peril by not seeing itself correctly—by not knowing how to interpret what it sees. In the context of the poem, de Bergerac's bird becomes a symbol for Verlaine: "The nightingale represents the singing bird that is the poet and through which Verlaine loves to represent himself, at the risk of appearing banal."[410]

Verlaine expresses the image of skewed reflection in multiple ways. The poem's structure enacts both small- and large-scale refracted reflection. On the small scale, alternating between 12-syllable and short 7-syllable lines, each rhymed couplet pairs lines of unequal lengths.[411] On the larger scale, although the rhyme scheme is essentially through-composed, the final rhyme pair ("feuillées" and "noyées") presents a weak echo (*rime pauvre*) of the first ("embrumée" and "fumée"). Raymond Monelle observes the sound reversals between the end-rhymes of the two stanzas, "almost as though the rhyme-scheme of the first strophe is reversed in the second, like a reflection"[412]

[409] Jacques Neefs, "Cyrano: Des miracles de rivière," trans. Charles S. Fineman, *Yale French Studies* 49, "Science, Language and the Perspective Mind: Studies in Literature and Thought from Campanella to Bayle" (1973): 187.
[410] "Le rossignol représent cet oiseau chanteur qu'est le poète et dans lequel Verlaine aime à se représenter, au risqué de paraîte banal." Pierre Brunel, *Le premier Verlaine: Des* Poèmes saturniens *aux* Romances sans paroles (Paris: Klincksieck, 2007), 335.
[411] As In-Ryeong Choi-Diel notes, the alternation of 12-syllable and 7-syllable lines (12/7) is unusual; many classical French poems instead alternate 12/6 or 12/8. "Parole et musique dans 'L'ombre des arbres': Verlaine et Debussy" *Langue française* 110, "Linguistique et poétique: Après Jakobson" (May 1996): 20–21.
[412] Monelle, "Semantic Approach," 195.

"Skewed reflection" also describes the relationships of the poetic quatrains to the epigraph and to each other. Verlaine's two quatrains act as variations on the epigraph, reversing the direction of its narrative gaze and progressively altering its images, tone, and tense. The epigraph begins by describing the bird "high on a branch," then drops to the surface of the water. In contrast, the narrative gaze of the poetic stanzas begins at water level and then ascends: the first couplets of both stanzas address shadow or reflection; the second couplets turn our attention upward, toward branches, leaves, and birds. The poetic stanzas also repeat the epigraph's images (bird, branch, reflection, river, and drowning), but these are mirrored in varied, refracted ways. For example, in lines 3–4 de Bergerac's disoriented nightingale becomes Verlaine's complaining turtledoves.[413] In the final stanza, these turtledoves are in turn replaced by the voyager's drowned hopes (line 8). It is notable that both of these poetic substitutes (the turtledoves, the drowned hopes) are audible: they complain and weep; de Bergerac's nightingale is counter-stereotypically mute.[414]

The bird in de Bergerac's fable exists in a generalized, almost eternal present tense ("toute fois," literally "every time," line 4). Like the epigraph, the first stanza is also in the present tense. But Verlaine does not maintain the objective clarity of the epigraph's philosophical present. Instead, he substitutes a poetic haze comprised by blurry pictorial imagery[415] (the river is obscured by mist, line 1), and a simile (shadows "die like smoke," line 2).

[413] Choi-Diel notes Verlaine's doubling of the epigraph's single bird. "Parole et musique," 19.
[414] Nightingales are particularly known for their beautiful songs.
[415] As Philip Stephan explains, "Here we have what might be called the most typical instance of Verlaine's visual esthetic: it is not dark, but rather, the light is obscured by fog; colors are present but in deadened form; and from these decidedly indefinite visual impressions, Verlaine draws esthetic pleasure, a conception of the world about him characterized by movement, sensation, flux, and inaccessibility." "Verlaine and Baudelaire: Two Uses of Obscured Lightings," *The French Review* 35, no. 1 (October, 1961): 33.

His diction gives aural expression to the same murky ambience.[416] The tone has also shifted, metaphorically darkened. "L'ombre" (the shadow)—by nature negative, the absence of light—is merely the first actor in the stanza's drama of decay. The dysphoric ambience creeps upward, as the turtledoves complain among the branches (line 3). Thus, within the first quatrain, the blurring and dissolution of the shadow (lines 1–2) subsequently infect the perception of the actual world ("real branches," lines 3–4).[417]

As Wenk writes, "The second stanza thus mirrors the metaphor of the first.[418] But Verlaine varies the material significantly, introducing the human element and moving to the past tense. Stanza 2 makes a dramatic turn to the vocative: the poem's speaker addresses the "voyageur" directly. The figure of the traveler could be seen simply as another actor in the poem's unfolding tableau; together with the shadow on the water, he is one of the poem's only moving elements. But—particularly given Verlaine's use of the informal "you,"—he also stands in for the reader, and for Verlaine himself. Here the poem's speaker begins to forge a connection between human experience and the natural world. Verlaine describes both the landscape and the voyager as "pale" ("blême"), a commonality that blurs the boundaries between landscape and human subject, as if blending the two into a single vista or reality. The traveler's despair in the second quatrain is reflected by the landscape introduced in the first quatrain.[419] "Pale" belongs to the blurred imagery endemic to the poem; it is at home with the haze and smoke of the trees' shadow, the imprecision of the skewed reflection. Yet, rather than choosing the more neutral adjective "pâle," Verlaine selects "blême," thereby intensifying the poem's negative atmosphere.

[416] "The darkness of nasals and the liquid effect of r (especially when combined with b into a trembling vibrancy) are well exploited—as in Verlaine's 'L'ombre des arbres dans la rivière embrumée.'" Robert Greer Cohn, "The A B C's of Poetry," *Comparative Literature* 14, no. 2 (Spring, 1962): 190.
[417] Meister points out that Verlaine's use of "the word 'réelles' used to modify 'ramures' puts into question the reality of 'les tourterelles.'" "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 188.
[418] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 107. Similarly, Monelle notes that the "symmetry" of "reflection" between stanzas is obvious. "Semantic Approach," 195.
[419] Monelle, "Semantic Approach," 195.

Signifying an extreme, sickly pallor, "blême" also carries aural echoes of "blemi," which in the Old French meant "blemished" or "tarnished." Moreover, the sonic repetition of "blême" (line 5), "blême" (line 6), and "toi-même" (line 6) are performative: they blanch the text's timbral palette, rejecting variety in favor of echoes.

Stanza 2's shift into past tense is multifaceted and disorienting. Whereas "mira" is in the fleeting preterit tense (line 6), "pleuraient" is in the more enduring imperfect tense (line 7). How does the use of past tense function in this poem? Is the voyager reliving the memory of the false perceptions that caused his despair? Perhaps the past tense serves as a distancing technique, re-enabling the objective stance. Christian Hervé argues that Verlaine's temporal slide is a linguistic reflection of "exile"; the substitution of tense effects a kind of poetic "estrangement."[420] Certainly, if Bergerac's fable was meant to warn of the fear brought on by misperception, Verlaine's voyager does not escape the brokenness of skewed reflection. In his real despair he mirrors the epigrammatic bird, trapped by a self-deceptive illusion.

Debussy's Setting of Verlaine's "L'ombre des arbres"

Dating from 1885, "L'ombre des arbres" is the third song in Debussy's *Ariettes oubliées*. The composer did not set the de Bergerac epigraph to music, but instead retained it as the song's epigraph. His setting of Verlaine's two short stanzas explores in musical materials and processes the ideas of blurred perception, inversion, illusion, and correspondence between the human and natural worlds. Within the characteristic motive itself, the music hovers between tonal and post-tonal logics, pointing toward several possible continuations and satisfying none. Over the course of the work, Debussy's thematic-harmonic design destabilizes its tonic, imbuing it with a potential energy that is never fully realized or relinquished. Using modular developmental

[420] "c'est le fait que le voyageur, réduit à l'état de reflect, est évoqué à la deuxième personne sur le mode du révolu. *Il se constitue en exile, parlant de l'exilé*, et, plutôt qu'une rétrospection, on supposera une substitution de temps, une énallage valant 'estrangement.'" Hervé, "Le temps," 275; italics in the original.

techniques, Debussy expresses inversion as a temporal confusion. Then, fracturing his patterns of repetition in unpredictable ways, he evokes illusions of completion. The song's form begins by conforming to Verlaine's stanzaic structure, but then radically distorts its proportions. United with Verlaine's past tense, the setting of the second stanza provides a backstory for the first, the drama of its events highlighting the landscape's reflection of human experience.

Characteristic Motive

Debussy marks the score "Lent et triste" and pianissimo, a delicate and reserved indication evocative of resignation. But the piano opens the work with an upwardly-resolving appoggiatura, an especially energetic version of the embellishment type (m. 1; "U" on the form diagram). The yearning directionality of the gesture is then compensated by a downward tritone leap, B–E♯.[421] The motive's second measure ("W" on the form diagram) continues the retreat or abatement through shorter note values that combine in compound melody a semitonal descent with lower pedal point.[422]

[421] Wenk names the tritone as the song's "elemental building block." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 108.

[422] There are similarities between this three-note motive in "L'ombre des arbres" (motive U, m. 1, A♯–B–E♯ over C♯ major) and important motives in "Spleen" and "Recueillement." While the exact intervals and non-chord-tone types are different, the motives' contours are similar and all three animate harmonies with potential, precarious, or contested dominant function. In "Spleen," the piano's jarring sforzando harmony in m. 3 is decorated with an escape-tone figure (motive X, m. 4, G–A♭–E over C major). In "Recueillement," the "Douleur" motive uses as its kernel a retardation or appoggiatura figure that also begins with an ascending half step (motive X, e.g., m. 10, G♯–A–E♯–F♯ over D^7). In "Spleen," the motive initially helps mitigate the tension of its harmony. In "Recueillement," the motive is associated with pain and yearning, and is paired with an unresolved dominant. In "L'ombre des arbres," the motive gestures toward yearning and then disappointment or acquiescence.

Figure 6.2. Music and poetry in "L'ombre des arbres"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
motive	U	W	U	W	W′	U′	U′		W″?	
harmony	C♯^{7}	Ger^{+6} in b, enhar. G^{7}	C♯^{7}	Ger^{+6}=G^{7}	(g♯^{ø7}) E^{7}	g♯	d♯$^{4/2}$	g♯	(g♯^{ø7} G^{M7}) e^{9} A^{13} D^{M7} **D**: ii^{9} V^{13} I^{M7}	
phrasing	Piano: 2 + 2 = 4				Piano: 2 + 2 = 4 (or) Piano: 2 + 2 + 2 = 6				Piano: 2 + ? (truncated)	
form	**A**									
line			*1*		*2*		*3*		*4*	
stanza			Stanza 1							

11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
U	W	U	W	W′	U′	X	U′	X	X
C♯^{7}	Ger^{+6}=G^{7}	C♯^{7}	Ger^{+6}=G^{7}	(g♯^{ø7}) E^{7}	g♯ E^{M7}	(e♯$^{ø6/5}$) g♯	g♯ E^{M7}	(e♯$^{ø6/5}$) g♯ e♯$^{ø4/3}$ C♯^{2} **F♯**: (vii$^{ø6/5}$) ii vii$^{ø4/3}$ V^{2}	
Piano: 2 + 2 = 4				Piano grouping ambiguous: does U represent a beginning or an ending?					
A′									
		5				*6*			
		Stanza 2							

21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
Y		Y	Z	Z	Z	U″	W	Z	Z	
(b^{ø7}) F♯$^{6/4}$ (vii$^{ø7/}$V) I$^{6/4}$	B g♯ C♯ IV ii V	(b^{ø7}) F♯$^{6/4}$ (vii$^{ø7/}$V) I$^{6/4}$	c♯^{ø7} a♯$^{o6/5}$ **B**: ii^{ø7} vii^{o7} . . .	a♯$^{o4/3}$	a♯$^{o4/2}$	G^{7} (cf. mm. 2, 4, 12, 14) =Ger^{+6}		G♯^{13} fx$^{ø6/5}$ d♯^{9} G♯^{13} C♯ **C♯**:V^{13} vii$^{ø7/}$V ii^{9} V^{13} I		
Piano: 2 + 2 (+2 extension)						Piano: 2 + 3				
B						**A″** (Postlude)				
7			*8*							
Stanza 2, continued										

Notes:

- **U**: Appoggiatura (later, retardation) plus downward leap (A♯–B–E♯)
- **W**: descending chromatic line. In the piano part, this is joined in compound melody to a lower pedal point
- **X**: ascending chromatic line ending with A♯–G♯ appoggiatura
- **Y**: D♯–C♯ with B♯–C♯
- **Z**: continuous syncopation

Harmonically, the two-part characteristic motive (U+W) flickers between major and minor, between directionality and stasis. The work's key signature implies either C♯ major or A♯ minor; although minor chords are sounded on the downbeats of mm. 1–4 (a♯$^{6/5}$ in bars 1 and 3, and e^{6} in bars 2 and 4[423]), each bar ends with a major quality (C♯^{7} in mm. 1 and 3; G^{7} in mm. 2 and 4).[424] Because C♯ may be understood as the first harmony (since the A♯ resolves as a dissonance) and because C♯ agrees with the key signature, it is projected as a plausible pitch center. However, the addition of B potentially destabilizes C♯ as V^{7} of F♯. Meanwhile, the harmony of mm. 2 and 4, while *sounding* as G^{7}, is spelled as a German augmented-sixth chord, G–B–D–E♯. As a tritone substitute for the C♯ dominant, the augmented-sixth chord points toward the dominant of B, F♯.[425]

Yet the repeating tritone oscillation follows a post-tonal logic, suspending the sense of functional directionality; there are no immediate confirmations of C♯, F♯, or B as tonics. The first six bars exhibit two additional traits that emphasize a sense of stasis. Allen Forte notes that the octatonic collection (1,2) controls the texture from mm. 1–5 (understanding the E♭ in mm. 2 and 4 as a passing tone),[426] and that the bassline in mm. 1–6 traces comprises a subset of the same collection (G–G♯–B–C♯–E)."[427] Further, motion between each of the primary harmonies in the

[423] While E♯ is sustained as a tied note, it is E♮ that sounds on the downbeats of mm. 2 and 4.
[424] In describing Debussy's "modal/chordal opening," Hepokoski argues that it is associated with "quasi-mystical reverie." "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," 48.
[425] Interpreting these harmonies in light of the poem, Monelle argues that because they share a tritone, the chords may be understood as reflections of one another. "Semantic Approach," 196–97. Although this augmented-sixth chord is not resolved (mm. 2, 4, 12, 14, and 27 all point toward an F♯ octave that never appears), "L'ombre des arbres" does employ other augmented-sixth harmonies in more traditional ways. Bars 5 and 15, which point toward a D♯ octave, do resolve to D♯—albeit in the context of G♯-minor harmonies. Most normatively, after the arrival on D^{M7} in m. 10, the moving voices form an augmented-sixth (D–F♯–A–B♯) that resolves conventionally to C♯ in m. 11.
[426] Forte, "Debussy and the Octatonic," 138.
[427] Ibid., 139.

first six measures constitutes zero-sum voice leading, and the cadential sonority of m. 6 (G♯-minor) relates back to the first (C♯^{7}) via the same means.[428]

Figure 6.3. Zero-sum voice-leading in "L'ombre des arbres," mm. 1–6

m. 1		m. 2		m. 3		m. 4		m. 5		m. 6		*m. 1*
B G♯ E♯ C♯	= ↓ = ↑	B G E♯ D	= ↑ = ↓	B G♯ E♯ C♯	= ↓ = ↑	B G E♯ D	= ↑ ↓ =	B G♯ E D	= = ↓ ↑	B G♯ D♯ (D♯)	= = ↑↑ ↓↓	*B* *G♯* *E♯* *C♯*
C♯^{7}		G^7		C♯^{7}		G^7		E^7		g♯		*C♯^{7}*

Small-Scale Developments of the Characteristic Motive

The characteristic motive serves as a crucial tool in Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion on both the small and large scale. On the small scale, the composer's recompositions of the motive allow him to evoke another kind of temporal inversion or stasis, as well as to engage the listener in creating musical illusions of completion and incompletion. In bar 5 the piano ostensibly moves on to new material, its new beginning accented with a startling sforzando. But the voice simultaneously reiterates most of the semitonal melody of W, stretching its descent over two measures: F–E–D♯, mm. 5–6.[429] By repeating the semitonal descent, Debussy creates a musical rhyme for the settings of Verlaine's end-rhyme pair "embrumée" (m. 4) and "fumée" (m. 5). Then in m. 6, the piano reiterates U. Thus, bars 5–6 present a mirrored reflection of the elements of the original characteristic motive.[430] (The presentation and transformations of the characteristic motive are presented in figure 6.4, below.) The switch in the element order of the characteristic motive provides a temporal counterpart to the spatial inversion described in the

[428] That is, the number of ascending (positive) and descending (negative) chromatic steps required to transform one harmony into the next add up to zero.
[429] The piano doubles this same descent, albeit without the embellishing rhythmic subdivisions.
[430] As Wenk writes, "measures 6–10 can be heard as a distorted reflection of measures 1–5." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 108.

epigraph. Because it is the *order* of the elements that undergoes inversion (rather than a more typical musical inversion of contour), the listener's sense of beginning and ending is confused or attenuated. This blurring and stasis musically mirrors the dying shadows on the misty river, the bird transfixed by fear.

As the song continues, the "reflection" is increasingly obscured. There is no semitonal descent in measure 7, but the piano plays U′ in bar 8. In yet another variation, bar 9 alludes to W, but bar 10 does not reiterate U. This play of elements on the small scale further emphasizes the modular quality of the characteristic motive. As expected elements fail to recur, Debussy enacts Verlaine's image of shadows dissipating like smoke (lines 1–2). The aural glimpses of familiar elements, however, suggest that a listener may fill in the Gestalt of the complete reflection. By his unpredictable occlusion of either U or W, Debussy creates the musical illusion of both completion (completed only by the listener) and incompletion (incomplete only in the score).

Figure 6.4. Modular recompositions in "L'ombre des arbres," stanza 1

m.	***motivic elements***	***version***
1–2	U–W	original
3–4	U–W	original
5–6	W′–U′	*reflection*
7–8	*–U′	*reflection? omits W*
9–10	W″?–*	*reflection? omits U*

Strophic Form and Reflections in Nature

Just as Verlaine's poetic stanzas present varied reflections of the epigraph and of one another, Debussy's setting begins by evoking strophic form. In bar 11 the original characteristic motive returns exactly, serving as an introduction to the setting of the second poetic stanza.[431] In fact, both the piano and vocal parts are very similar for the first six measures of both stanzas

[431] Bourion argues that Debussy develops his two-bar motive in the style of a fugue. That is, the song's "expositions" (*expositions*) treat the motive to "orthodox" (à la doxa) repetitions whereas the episodic passages (*divertissements*) may refer to motivic content more obliquely. *Le style de Claude Debussy*, 422; italics in the original.

(compare mm. 11–16 to mm. 1–6). In addition, Debussy concludes both stanzas with nearly identical cadences. At the close of stanza 1, an extended-tertian formula cadences in D major (ii^{9}–V^{13}–I^{M7}; mm. 9–10). At the end of the work, a similar progression reifies C♯ major (ii^{9}–V^{13}–I; mm. 30–31). The similarity between these two endings is particularly striking, because these are the only measures in which Debussy uses a clear series of (functionally) descending fifths.

But, although it begins and ends by reiterating familiar passages from stanza 1, Debussy's setting for stanza 2 also dramatically distorts the balanced form of Verlaine's poem.[432] In relation to the durational and expressive expectations created by the first verse, the setting of stanza 2 is significantly expanded. New thematic materials (e.g., mm. 17 and 21)[433] nearly double the length of the second verse. The pacing of the text is also much slower. In the setting of stanza 1, each poetic line is given only two bars of music. By contrast, in the first half of stanza 2 (mm. 13–20), Debussy expands each poetic line to four measures of music; in the second half of stanza 2 (mm. 21–26), each poetic line occupies three measures.

Beginning in m. 17, Debussy introduces a sense of drama with a "*crescendo un poco stringendo.*" The rare melismas on "voyageur" (m. 14) and "même" (mm. 19–20) contribute to the same increase in intensity. The vocal melody in mm. 19–20 also echoes the descending chromatic line of W, albeit on new pitches (D♯–D–C♯). By recalling previous material, the vocal melody and piano accompaniment associate the voyager (m. 14, mm. 19–20) with the shadow (m. 2), blurred appearance (m. 4), and faltering instability (mm. 5–6) of the pale landscape (mm. 15–16).

[432] As Wenk observes, "The second half of the song is a distorted image of the first half." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 108.

[433] This new material bears some resemblance to the original characteristic motive. Like the embellishing A♯ on the first beat of the characteristic motive (m. 1, etc.), the embellishing B♯ on the first beat of m. 21 (and m. 23) resolves upward by half step on beat 2.

In "L'ombre des arbres," the beginnings of the piano's four- or six-bar blocks do not align with the beginning of the poetic couplets. (Perhaps the overlapping of boundaries is in keeping with the blurred, smoky quality of the shadow on the misty river.) But by m. 21 the onset of the four-bar block and the poetic couplet synchronize. Together with the crescendo and heightened tessitura (the voice sings A♯5, the highest note of the piece), this formal alignment highlights the text "And how sadly were weeping" (line 7). Providing only faint acknowledgement of Verlaine's stunning vocative turn ("ô voyageur," line 5), Debussy's setting instead gives rhapsodic emphasis to the onset of overtly emotional text, to the line that names the sadness permeating the poem.[434] But there is also something unusual about this musical climax. With its major-key crescendo to an accented "And," followed immediately by sighing descent and decrescendo through "how sadly were weeping" (mm. 21–22),[435] Debussy emphasizes the doubling of correspondence rather than the loss of hope. That is, the pale landscape resembles the pale voyager *and* the complaining birds resemble his frustrated hopes. Taking second place to the discovery of correspondence, the traveler's despair is rendered poignant instead of melodramatic. Thus, the setting's asymmetrical focus on the second stanza—achieved through expanded text setting, the addition of new materials, and an unexpected emphasis on the start of line 7—exaggerates the poem's turn from nature to the self as reflected in nature.

Backstories: Composing-Out the Characteristic Motive

The second stanza's new material composes-out an essential aspect of the characteristic motive's harmonic drama. As discussed above, despite the seven-sharp key signature, C♯^{7} (m. 1) could point toward F♯, and the subsequent augmented-sixth chord (m. 2) both *continues* the anticipation of F♯ and simultaneously *redirects* the harmonic vector toward B. Yet the setting of

[434] As Howat describes, this passage (mm. 17–21) crosses the work's golden section. *Debussy in Proportion*, 36.
[435] Goubault notes Debussy's contradiction of accent in the setting of "Et que tristes" (And how sadly). *Claude Debussy*, 138.

the first stanza establishes neither F♯ nor B. With the new material of the song's second verse, Debussy makes sustained gestures toward both F♯ and B, yet, just as in the characteristic motive, neither center is unequivocally established.

Beginning in bar 17, repeated intimations of $e♯^{ø7}$ destabilize the G♯-minor plateau (mm. 17–20). A series of increasingly insistent dominants (first $vii^{ø7}$, then $V^{4/2}$, then $I^{6/4}$ with low bass) suggests that an inevitable cadence on F♯ is imminent. Debussy evades the cadence (mm. 21–22), but immediately reiterates the approach (ii–V–$I^{6/4}$, mm. 22–23).[436] F♯ never arrives. Instead, the surprising substitution of $c♯^{ø7}$ on the downbeat of m. 24 and the reiteration of $a♯^{o7}$ in bars 24–26 point forward to an arrival on B.[437] At the end of m. 26, Debussy highlights the tripled A♯ with a sforzando, and this leading tone resolves to B as expected in m. 27. But the harmonizing sonority is deceptive, as Debussy reprises the characteristic motive's G^7 = German augmented-sixth harmony.[438] Thus, the setting finally connects this augmented-sixth to B while simultaneously denying the establishment of B.

Because this composing-out sets the poem's *past tense*, the passage's extended and vivid pursuit of F♯ and B may be understood as a reliving of past events.[439] The original characteristic motive—although *heard* first—may be understood as a pale echo of, or rumination on, the "earlier" attempts to establish F♯ and B. Thus, the preparation for the final appearance of the characteristic motive provides the original theme with a backstory of loss: A♯ arises as a suspension (retardation), a leading tone to B that succeeds in its melodic gesture but relinquishes

[436] This progression evokes the descending-fifth cadential formulae of mm. 9–10 and 30–31, but does not complete as expected.
[437] Here, with its final notes, the vocal melody countermands expected text-painting: outlining the diminished seventh A♯–G, the melisma for "noyées" ("drowned") arcs first *upward* before descending again to A♯4.
[438] Compare mm. 1–2, where Debussy accompanies motive U with $C♯^7$ and motive W with G^7. In m. 27, the piano recombines the elements of the characteristic motive, layering motive U with G^7. This recombination demonstrates another sense in which the two harmonies—$C♯^7$ and G^7—are substitutes for one another.
[439] Note also that the subdominant key areas the music pursues—in the key of C♯, IV (F♯) and IV/IV (B)—are topically associated with the pastoral.

its harmonic vector. And, although the E♯–B tritone is apparently available as a means to F♯ since the beginning of the piece, the progressions behave as if F♯ were thought to be unattainable ("drowned hopes"). Indeed, the postlude mimics the original characteristic motive by reiterating rather than resolving E♯.[440] Just as the vocal melody begins, so does the piano end—with six repeated E♯s (mm. 2–3 and mm. 28–31).

Undermining Tonic

In "L'ombre des arbres," Debussy's construction of C♯-centricity is purposefully tenuous. Although the G♯-minor harmony in m. 6 may be understood as a half cadence,[441] its arrival is doubly deceptive. The E^7 in m. 5 points toward A (a connection that is reprised and realized in mm. 9–10), but Debussy treats this harmony as an augmented sixth, resolving E and D to D♯. The subposed G♯ in m. 6 thus contradicts both probable continuations. While the song's key signature and final cadence assert that G♯ is the dominant, its contextual manifestation is suspect rather than structural. When G♯ minor returns in the second stanza, it is reintroduced in the same way, then destabilized as ii in F♯. For, as we have seen, the song spends much of its tonal energy in a feint toward F♯.

Summarizing Bruce Archibald's analysis, Wenk argues that "the key of C♯ (which is perfectly convincing at the end) is never once supported by its dominant. Instead the entire song aims at (or suggests) the *subdominant* of C♯—a mirror of tonal practice."[442] But, even viewed through this inverted tonal logic, the song's conclusion in C♯ is not without question. As described above, the cadence at the close of the first stanza uses tonality as a topical marker of

[440] In measure 28, Debussy allows the note to slip momentarily downward to E♮, as if resolving the chordal seventh. But the semitonal slide continues past E♮, and the end of this measure restrikes E♯.
[441] Forte, "Debussy and the Octatonic," 138 and Somer, "Chromatic Third-Relations," 223.
[442] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 108n3. Wenk provides no additional reference information for Archibald's analysis.

closure, suddenly establishing the Neapolitan as if by *deus ex machina* (mm. 9–10). Although the key signature implies that this cadence (to D major) is transitory whereas the final cadence (to C♯) is conclusive, the reuse of the cadential formula gives the cadences a kind of equal footing. Indeed, since C♯ has not been developed traditionally but has instead been employed as a dominant pointing toward an elusive F♯, the final cadence may sound as facile and as provisional as the first. Returning to its first thematic materials (replaying the characteristic motive and recalling the vocal entry), the conclusion of the work is not allowed to sink into C♯ with total repose. However static, the nominal tonic still carries the imprint of its lost dominant function.

Debussy's design in "L'ombre des arbres" bears similarity to "Spleen": the initial harmonies are related by tritone ($C♯^7$–G^7, and G♭–C, respectively) and, in both cases, the voice begins with repeated notes, like a reciting tone. In both songs, the composer employs similar three-note motives that begin with a half-step ascent: motive U in "L'ombre des arbres" and the escape-tone figure in "Spleen." Both songs undermine and reassert their key signatures. Perhaps these commonalities are unsurprising since both songs belong to the same collection, *Ariettes oubliées.* But there are important differences. Whereas "Spleen" begins by topically stabilizing the Neapolitan, "L'ombre des arbres" begins by destabilizing its tonic. In "Spleen," the pastoral ideal is first experienced, then shattered by the "real" dominant. In the characteristic motive of "L'ombre," the same structures that imply tonal directionality may also be explained as nontonal and static. The short-lived arrival on the Neapolitan seems almost accidental, not the result of sustained effort. While the work makes repeated and sustained gestures toward IV—and even toward IV/IV—it confirms neither. Thus, in "L'ombre des arbres," Debussy's design enacts the loss of efficacy while retaining the memory of its process.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "L'ombre des arbres"

There are other clues to Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion in the design of "L'ombre des arbres." Perhaps the most obvious is found in the song's poised equilibrium—achieved through both thematic and harmonic events—between F♯ and C♯. While the potential of the E♯ "leading tone" is never fully realized, neither is it fully forgotten. Instead, Debussy's topical use of tonality ends by undermining the final cadence. Temporal distortion is first invoked on the small scale, with the first stanza's reordered and broken reflections of the characteristic motive. While Debussy begins by acknowledging Verlaine's strophic form, the song goes on to create its own, contradictory structure (AABA′) and then ends as if returning to stanzaic protocol. Rather than focusing on Verlaine's recognition of the human figure, or even on the traveler's despair, the unexpected formal turn of Debussy's setting emphasizes the blurring of lines between the landscape and the traveler. Debussy again engages temporality, using this formal departure to create a harmonic and thematic backstory for the characteristic motive, as if the later developments could explain the work's opening.

Debussy's "De rêve," Prosaic and Lyrical: A Surfeit of Refrains

Debussy's own poem, "De rêve" was published first as a literary work.[443] Although divided into stanzas with clear line breaks, "De rêve" exhibits its "prosaic" qualities through Debussy's use of widely varying line lengths and very few end rhymes (see figure 6.5, below). Even the division into stanzas does not follow typical verse expectations, resulting in uneven partitions. Of the four stanzas, the first and third have six lines each. The second stanza expands to eight lines, and the fourth stanza has seven lines. While dispensing with the more typical

[443] *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* 5, no. 33 (December 1892): 269–70. Wenk describes significant similarities between Debussy's "De rêve" and Henri de Régnier's lengthy poem, *Le songe de la forêt.* Régnier was the poet to whom Debussy showed his four (literary) *Proses lyriques*, and who subsequently recommended the publication of the first two in *Entretiens.* Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 200–201, 198.

formal markers of poetic verse, Debussy substitutes instead several refrain constructions that articulate the form and create a web of recurrence that imbues his "prose" with a lyrical quality.

The first refrain patterning derives from the first three lines of the poem ("La nuit a des douceurs de femmes! / Et les vieux arbres sous la lune d'or, songent / À celle qui vient de passer la tête emperlée"). These lines are recalled, in reverse order, at the beginnings of stanzas 2–4. Line 1 recurs exactly at the beginning of stanza 4. Its unchanged aspect inscribes a static boundary around the poem that enacts its final verb, "étreint" (to clutch, grip, or embrace). A variant of line 2 ("Les vieux arbres sous la lune d'or, pleurent") begins stanza 3. The conjunction "et" has been dropped, since this line now initiates a stanza, and the old trees no longer dream, but instead are weeping their golden leaves (lines 15–16). The most subtle aspect of this refrain is line 3 ("Of the one who has just passed, her head impearled"). Without reiterating this phrasing, stanza 2 nevertheless begins with a very similar description: "All [of them]! They have passed." In both cases, the focus is on a woman (or women) who have passed. When the image repeats in stanza 2, it is developed. Now totalized plural ("All") rather than singular, the image acquires amplified power. With its reiteration, Debussy also suggests not merely that the women have walked past, but that they have passed out of the speaker's life or even passed on. This interpretation is further supported by the now weeping trees (line 15).

Figure 6.5. Claude Debussy, "De Rêve," Entretiens politiques et littéraires, *December 1892*

	De rêve[444]	Of dreaming
1	**La nuit a des douceurs de femme[s]!**	**The night has the sweetness of women [of a woman]!**
2	**Et les vieux arbres sous la lune d'or, songent**	**And the old trees under the golden moon, dream**
3	**À celle qui vient de passer la tête emperlée,**	**Of the one who has just passed, her head impearled,**
4	**Maintenant navrée!**	**Now saddened!**
5	**À jamais navrée!**	**Forever saddened!**
6	Ils n'ont pas su lui faire signe. . . .	They did not know how to signal to [beckon] her. . . .
7	**Toutes! Elles ont passé**	**All [of them]! They have passed**
8	**Les Frêles,**	**The Frail** [also, "Fragile" or "Delicate"]
9	**Les Folles,**	**The Foolish,**
10	Semant leur rire au gazon grêle,	Sowing their laughter on the thin grass,
11	Aux brises frôleuses	To the brushing breezes
12	La caresse charmeuse	The charming caress
13	Des hanches fleurissantes!	Of flowering hips!
14	Hélas! de tout ceci, plus rien qu'un blanc frisson[.]	Alas! Of all this, nothing [remains] but a white frisson [ephemeral trace].
15	**Les vieux arbres sous la lune d'or, pleurent**	**The old trees beneath the golden moon, weep**
16	Leurs belles feuilles d'or	Their beautiful, golden leaves
17	Nul ne leur dédiera plus la fierté des casques d'or	No one will ever again dedicate to them the pride of golden helmets
18	**Maintenant ternis!**	**Now tarnished!**
19	**À jamais ternis!**	**Forever tarnished!**
20	Les chevaliers sont morts sur le chemin du Grâal!	The knights are dead on the quest [path] for the Grail.
21	**La nuit a des douceurs de femme[s]!**	**The night has the sweetness of women [of a woman]!**
22	Des mains semblent frôler les âmes	Some hands seem to brush souls
23	**Mains si folles!**	**Hands so foolish!**
24	**[Mains] si frêles**!	**[Hands] so frail!**
25	Au temps où les épées chantaient pour Elles! . . .	In the time when swords used to sing for Them! . . .
26	D'étranges soupirs s'élèvent sous les arbres	Strange sighs arise from under the trees.
27	Mon âme! C'est du rêve ancien qui t'étreint!	My soul! It is some ancient dream that grips you!

[444] The line breaks of this text replicate the original literary version of the poem. I have modernized the original accents and ellipses. In his song setting, Debussy makes "femmes" singular (lines 1, 21) and omits the repetition of "Mains" in line 24. Note that the individual title ("De rêve") only appears in the musical score. The bold font is my own emphasis, which I use here to highlight the poem's refrain elements.

As the second aspect of refrain patterning, each of the four stanzas encloses a pair of short lines, and these pairs also serve as refrains. In the pacing of the stanza, these enclosed short-line refrains provide an accelerated contrast to the longer lines framing each stanza. And, although the variance in line-lengths is slightly different in each stanza, the inclusion of a short-line refrain in each results in similar wave-like or hourglass stanzaic shapes. Lines 4–5 read "Maintenant navrée! / À jamais navrée!" This construction returns in stanza 3, where lines 18–19 read "Maintenant ternis! / À jamais ternis!" Although "heartbroken" is replaced by "tarnished," the sense of ruin is common to both pairs.

In stanzas 2 and 4, Debussy uses yet another refrain. Lines 8–9 are "Les Frêles, / "Les Folles," where adjectives describe women who have passed. Like the mirrored return of lines 1–3, the return of these adjectives in the final stanza shows chiastic inversion of ordering: "Mains si folles! / Mains si frêles!" (lines 23–24).[445] This time, as if a result of entropic disintegration, the refrain evokes the women through metonymy: only their hands are present, but these parts represent the whole. Aurally, this version of the refrain echoes the other short-line refrain, as "mains" (lines 22, 23, and 24) recalls "maintenant." (lines 4 and 18).

Sonic Designs and the Women Who Touch Souls

The web of words and images created by these several refrains is augmented by other repetitions. A complete (*rime riche*) end-rhyme connects "Frêles" (lines 8, 24) and "grêle" (line 10), which is more subtly echoed by "pour Elles" (line 25). In other cases, the end rhymes are

[445] Chiastic construction is a widespread device often associated with oral tradition. Examples include Homeric verse, Old Testament psalms, Maori narrative, and Japanese poetry. James F. Morris, "'Dream Scenes' in Homer: A Study in Variation," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983): 39–54, and especially 46–47; John T. Willis, "The Juxtaposition of Synonymous and Chiastic Parallelism in Tricola in Old Testament Hebrew Psalm Poetry," *Vetus Testamentum* 29, fasc. 4 (October 1979): 465–80; Agathe Thornton, "Two Features of Oral Style in Maori Narrative," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 94, no. 2 (June 1985): 149–76, and especially 160–61; Edwina Palmer, "The 'Womë-No' Poem of 'Harima Fudoki' and Residual Orality in Ancient Japan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 63, no. 1 (2000): 81–89, and especially 82.

weaker. For example, "frôleuses" at the end of line 11 is followed by "charmeuse" at the end of line 12 (*rime suffissante*). "Emperlée" (line 3) is weakly echoed by "navrée" (*rime pauvre*, lines 4 and 5). In addition to end rhymes, Debussy emphasizes a particular family of alliterative and similar words that relate to "femmes" in line 1 (and 21). These sounds are most pervasive in stanza 2, which provides a description of the women: "Frêles," "Folles," "frôleuses," "fleurissantes," and "frisson" (stanza 2, lines 8, 9, 11, 13, and 14); "feuilles" and "fierté" (stanza 3, lines 16 and 18); "frôler," "folles," and frêles" (stanza 4, lines 22, 23, and 24).

Debussy also repeats words outside the context of his many refrains. The trees—part of the original refrain in lines 2 and 15—appear again near the end of the poem in line 26. In the opening of the poem, the trees are dreaming ("songent," line 2). This activity finds imagistic repetition—although a different word is used—in the speaker gripped by the "ancient dream" at the poem's conclusion ("rêve ancien," line 27). The plural "souls" of line 22 are compressed to a single "soul"—the speaker's—in line 27.[446] The gilded nature of this poem is affirmed not only in its refrain ("the golden moon," lines 2 and 15), but also in the "golden leaves" figuratively "wept" by the autumnal trees (lines 15–16), and in the knights' "golden helmets" (line 17).

The Tenses of the Dream

In a poem about a speaker in the clutch of an "ancient dream" (line 27), the use of the present tense helps to suspend any narrative action, imbuing it with a timeless quality and a sense of immediacy. For example, although the trees "dream" in stanza 1 and "weep" in stanza 3, there is no cue besides this sequential ordering that the trees *first* dream *and then* weep. Perhaps, in fact, these actions are simultaneous or alternate continuously; the consistent use of the present tense does not offer clarification. At the same time, Debussy often uses the past participle as an

[446] Note also that in French, "souls" ("âmes") is a slant rhyme (*rime pauvre*) of "women" ("femmes").

adjective, suffusing the present-tense text with implied past actions: “emperlée,” line 3; “navrée,” lines 4 and 5; and “ternis,” lines 18 and 19.)

There are two sets of exceptions to his pervasive use of the present tense, exceptions that highlight particular imagery. The first set of exceptions describes the passing of the women, a reiterated idea that constitutes part of the poem’s refrain patterning (explained above). In this set, the constructions use a present-tense auxiliary to create the past perfect. Ideally suited to the content, the form of these constructions suggests a present-tense connection to the past. The trees dream of the woman who “has just passed” (“vient de passé,” an example of the *passé récent*, line 3), whom “they did not know how to signal” (“Ils n’ont pas su lui faire signe,” an example of the *passé composé*, line 6). Using the same *passé composé* conjugation, the speaker reveals that “All! They have passed” (“Toutes! Elles ont passé,” line 7).

The second set of non-present-tense conjugations is associated with evocations of the age of chivalry and serves to emphasize its inaccessibility. In line 17, the use of the future tense ironically ensures bleak closure: “No one will ever again dedicate to them the pride of golden helmets” (Nul ne leur dédiera plus la fierté des casques d’or”). In line 25 Debussy uses the imperfect past tense to describe this lost age, in which “the swords used to sing for Them” (les epées chantaient pour Elles”).

Nostalgia and Traces

The nostalgic rhetoric of “De rêve” counterpoises the “sweetness of women” (directly in lines 1, 21; by inference in lines 3, 10–13 and 22) with their sadness (lines 4–5) and the sadness of those separated from them (line 6, 14). This sense of loss is also dramatized as the ruin of a chivalric age that can never return: “the knights are dead on the quest for the Grail” (line 20), their helmets tarnished forever (lines 17–19). Since the poem begins and ends at night (lines 1,

21), and in the third stanza the weeping of golden leaves (line 15–16) suggests autumn, the poem is situated toward the nadir of both the diurnal and annual cycles. This end-of-time setting underscores the end-of-life perspective suggested by the "old trees" (lines 2, 15, and 26) that appear to represent the speaker himself.

The lyric of "De rêve" focuses attention on lingering presence despite lost connection. We learn that a woman "has just passed" (line 3), but the connection was missed; the old trees "did not know how to signal her" (line 6). Nevertheless, the speaker says that "The night *has* the sweetness of women" (line 1, my emphasis). The second stanza magnifies the speaker's sense of loss, but describes how the women left behind other ephemeral traces of themselves "Sowing their laughter on the sparse grass" (line 10) and "To the brushing breezes / The charming caress / Of flowering hips!" (lines 11–13). Now the resonance of these traces has diminished; the thrill is reduced to nothing more than "a white frisson" (line 14).

The theme of connection returns in the final stanza, where the speaker describes some (women's) hands as "seem[ing] to brush souls" (line 22). In contrast to the end-of-time cycles described previously, the sighs at the close of the lyric are said to "arise" (line 26). They represent the blossoming of an opposing cycle: the traces sown by the women in the second stanza—and metaphorically watered by the weeping trees of the third stanza—result in sighs that, like strange flowers, arise from under the trees in the penultimate line. The lyric's final verb (line 27) makes the poem's most forcible connection: "étreindre" means to grip, clutch, or embrace. Although all that remains is the dream, it is capable of holding the speaker fast.

Debussy's Setting of "De rêve"

As briefly described above (footnote 444), the song text of "De rêve" in its first edition[447] differs slightly from the original literary version. Other than making "femmes" singular ("femme," lines 1 and 21), most of the other changes involve capitalization or punctuation. The majority of the changes in capitalization create a more prose-like presentation of the text, with fewer line breaks. For example, the song text of the first edition drops most of the refrain-line exclamation points, thereby softening these lines' rhetorical intensity.[448] Achieving similar ends, instead of repeating the entire refrain construction "Mains si folles"! / Mains si frêles! (lines 23–24), the song text suppresses the repetition of "mains": "mains si folles, si frêles" (mm. 72–75).

In contrast to these mollifying variations, the change that most heightens the text's rhetoric is the capitalization and punctuation of "songent." In the *Entretiens* version, this word is neither capitalized nor punctuated. In bar 4 of the score, "Songent!" is now capitalized and given an exclamation point, thus bringing attention to the word which is also a synonym for the song's title. The exclamation point adds a rhetorical break that further highlights Debussy's poetic enjambment between lines 2 and 3, thereby enacting the temporal drift of daydreaming. In the third stanza, the parallel refrain line that ends with "pleurent" (line 15, m. 49) receives no such emphasis. Instead, in the first edition, the added exclamation point appears after "d'or" (line 16, m. 51), this time enhancing the continuity—rather than the disjuncture—of the enjambment (lines 15–16).[449]

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[447] Claude Debussy, *Proses lyriques* (Paris: E. Fromont, 1895), IMSLP Petrucci Music Library, http://imslp.org/wiki/File:SIBLEY1802.17382.c1aa-39087013806346Proses.pdf.

[448] Ibid., lines 1, 4, 5, 18, 19, 21, 23, and 24 (mm. 2, 15, 17, 57, 58, 66, 73, and 75, respectively). Note that Briscoe, in his edition that also draws on the autograph score, retains the exclamation points for lines 1 (m. 2) and 21 (m. 66). *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 64 and 70, respectively.

[449] Briscoe also adds the capitalization of and exclamation point following "Songent!" (m. 4), but does not add the exclamation point after "d'or" (m. 59). *Songs of Claude Debussy*, vol. 2, 64 and 68, respectively.

Form and Thematic Design

Debussy's musical setting of "De rêve" roughly follows his poetic divisions into four stanzas. As I will explain (and see figure 6.6, below), his motivic design articulates a far more nuanced expression of this four-part form. The song opens with a gentle, mysterious theme in the piano (W) that recurs later in the work, thereby underscoring the unusual design of the poetic refrain. Debussy also emphasizes the sense of stanza 4 as a return by closing stanzas 1 and 4 with similar materials (Y). In addition to these rhetorical beginnings (W) and endings (Y), the "song" motive (X) accompanies poetic lines that describe the remembered women. Motive X serves as the song's primary melodic source, recurring in all four stanzas. In contrast, Z (the "chivalric" motive) figures primarily in stanza 3. This motive is the most strongly topical of the four, and its fanfare melody appears only in conjunction with poetic descriptions of the chivalric age.

Motive W: Refrain

The song opens with descending tritones in the left hand (F♯–C); each new descent is embellished by an anticipatory upper neighbor. While the left-hand line belongs entirely to the whole-tone collection (0,2), the embellishing arpeggios in the right hand do not. F♯ is embellished with an ascending B♭$^{+}$ triad (so spelled, but enharmonically identical to F♯$^{+}$ and D^{+}); C is embellished with an ascending A♭ triad whose E♭ does not belong to the (0,2) whole-tone collection. Marked pianissimo, and falling at moderate tempo through the 12/8 meter, this first theme is gentle, dancelike, and—as a result of its symmetrical harmonic structures and dynamic level—delicately otherworldly or mysterious.

Figure 6.6. Music and poetry in "De rêve"

Notes on the motivic material:

- **W**: piano refrain motive; ~~W~~ (liquidated)
- **X**: "song" motive; ~~X~~ (fragment); X? (fragment and deformation)
- **Y↑**: "walking" motive, lower-register ascent in quarters; **Y~**: upper-register meander in eighths; ~~Y~~~: accompaniment only
- **Z**: "chivalric" motive; **Z***: dotted-rhythm arpeggio; ~~Z~~ (liquidated)
- **(025)**: in m. 2, the voice sings "douceurs de femme" on A♭–G♭–E♭, a descending cell that later recurs in the piano

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
motive and meter	W 12/8	(025) voice	~~W~~			X 3/4				X				X? (voice and piano)		X? (voice and piano)	
harmony	F♯$^{+}$ (post-tonal, symmetrical)		F♯–d osc.	F♯$^{♭13}$ or F♯$^{7(♯5)}$		B Aeolian			B♭^{7}	b	→ D major		G♯^{7}	WT (1,3)?	C^{+}	WT (1,3)?	C^{+} =E^{+}
line		*1 night*	*2 trees, golden moon, dream*						*3 of the one (woman) who has just passed*					*4 saddened*		*5 forever saddened*	
stanza		Stanza 1															

18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
Y↑		Y~		Y↑		Y~		Y↑		Y~	
Pedal on A							G^{7}	A		f♯	b
		6 they didn't know how to signal her									
Stanza 1, cont.											

30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46
X; *pp* 16th-note oscillation in upper range ("shimmer")				~~X~~? "shimmer" oscillation		"shimmer" oscillation				~~X~~		X Z*		Z*		
G Lydian			e^{7}			b^{11}?	D^{13}	G^{7} C♯$^{+}$	G^{7} C♯$^{+}$	chromatic		A Phrygian? D Aeolian?			B♭ d♯^{ø7}	B♭ g^{7}
	7 (cf. line 3) all (of the women) have passed			*8 frail*	*9 foolish*	*10 sowing laughter*		*11 to the breeze*	*12 caress*	*13 of flowering hips*				*14 alas! only a white frisson remains*		
	Stanza 2															

47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64
W 12/8	~~W~~ Z (prefigured)					Z 4/4		Z*		Z	~~Z~~			~~Z~~	Z*		
F♯$^{+}$ WT (0, 2)	F♯–d osc.	F♯$^{♭13}$ or F♯$^{7(♯5)}$				F♯ pedal; 5♯ signature (B major)						G^{+}	C? no ♯ signature		G? over F♯ ped !		
14	*15 (cf. line 2)* *trees, moon, weep*		*16* *golden leaves*			*17* *no one will ever again dedicate to them the pride of golden helmets*				*18 (lines 18–19 cf. lines 4–5)* *tarnished*	*19* *forever tar-nished*		*20* *knights dead on the quest for the Grail*				
	Stanza 3																

65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81
W 12/8		X 3/4				X					~~X~~		Z	Z*	~~X~~	
F♯$^{+}$ (post-tonal) 2♯ signature		E Major/Lydian			B♭^{9}	*F Aeolian? E♭ Mixolydian?*					C♯^{9} → F♯ Major?				B^{9} → E Major? Vocal A5 apex	
	21 (cf. line 1) *night*		*22* *hands brush souls*			*23 (lines 23–24, cf. lines 8–9)* *hands so foolish*				*24* *so frail*			*25* *in the time when swords used to sing for them*			
	Stanza 4															

82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99
(025); cf. m. 2 voice “douceurs” Z*				(025) in bass		X Y↑		Y~		Y~				Z*	~~Y~~	Z*	~~Y~~
B pedal				G G^{7}	G G^{7}	F♯–d♯ osc.; 6♯ signature		F♯ pedal				F♯ pedal					
25		*26* *sighs arise from under the trees*						*27* *my soul! some ancient dream grips you*									
Stanza 4, cont.																	

Notes on the poem and vocal setting:

- This diagram reflects the line breaks printed in the published poem
- Shaded cells indicate refrain patterning in the *poetic* text
- Poetic lines set with short vocal anacruses are shown as starting on the following downbeat
- Vocal phrase ends are elided with new piano materials at the beginnings of stanzas 3 and 4 (mm. 47 and 82)

Opening the song, characteristic motive W then accompanies the first poetic refrain, "La nuit a des douceurs de femme" (mm. 1–2). In m. 3, the motive is liquidated, although the right hand continues an ascending sixteenth-note configuration. As such, W inaugurates and suffuses a larger musical block (mm. 1–5) that also encompasses the setting of the second line of the refrain ("Et les vieux arbres, sous la lune d'or, Songent!"), and ends on an F♯ dominant (F♯$^{♭13}$ or F♯$^{7[♯5]}$) that extends the same whole-tone collection. Motive W returns at the beginning of stanzas 3 and 4 (mm. 47 and 65), thereby highlighting the inverted poetic refrain of lines 1 and 2 as the first lines of stanzas 4 and 3, respectively. Debussy further emphasizes the sense of return by repeating the original *vocal* melody in these same passages: the vocal line from mm. 3–4 recurs in mm. 48–49, and the vocal line from mm. 1–2 returns in mm. 65–66).

Motive X: "Song"

The second important characteristic motive begins in measure 6. Here, a new homophonic texture highlights the piano's first real melody, a modal tune with an inverted arch shape. This characteristic motive first appears in conjunction with references to the women who have passed by (lines 3 and 7; starting in mm. 6 and 30, respectively). As such, it underscores the third part of Debussy's unusual, inverted refrain structure, connecting line 3 to the first line of stanza 2.[450] Thereafter, the motive accompanies the settings of the frisson that remains in the women's wake (line 14, m. 42), of the women's hands (lines 22–24, m. 67), and of souls (line 27, m. 88). Variants of this motive also accompany the setting of the women's power in the chivalric age (line 25, mm. 76 and 80).

Over the course of the song, this characteristic motive is both transposed and reharmonized. As we saw in the 1892 setting of "En sourdine," this is a technique Debussy often

[450] Note that Debussy does not create supporting musical refrains for the short-line refrain pairs. While there is poetic connection between the short-line refrain pairs of stanzas 1 and 3 (lines 4–5 and 18–19), and stanzas 2 and 4 (lines 8–9 and 23–24), their musical settings do not help cue recognition.

uses in programmatic association with memory.[451] In "De rêve," Debussy's radical reharmonizations preserve the melody's intervallic structure but shift its modal center along its scalar axis (see figure 6.7, below). Appearing more times than any other motive in the piece, it is given new context at each appearance, and progressively destabilized. This combination of resonance and fragility resembles the women in the poem. Despite—perhaps, because of—their frailty and foolishness (lines 8–9, 23–24), they nevertheless persist in memory's "ancient dream" (27), which is still able to touch the soul (23).

In its first appearance, the melody is harmonized with B Aeolian (natural minor), suggesting that the melody begins on $\hat{2}$ (the C♯ in m. 6). When the melody repeats, the harmonization shifts to D major (mm. 11–12, "emperlée"), suggesting that the melody's first note (the C♯ in m. 10) could be reinterpreted as $\hat{7}$. When this motive returns in the lower register (mm. 30–33), the same melodic pentachord (comprising G–A–B–C♯–D) is set against a G-major triad, making the first melodic note ♯$\hat{4}$ within the context of G-Lydian. Towards the end of the piece, the melodic pentachord is transposed to start on B and set within the context of F♯-major (prefigured in fragment in mm. 76–77 and established in mm. 88–91). Here the motive's first note again becomes $\hat{7}$, a recapturing of the melody's first transformation (from B Aeolian to D major in mm. 10–12).

All three of these melodic reinterpretations begin with a relatively unstable gesture: $\hat{2}$–$\hat{1}$–♭$\hat{7}$ (B Aeolian), $\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ (D major/F♯ major), and ♯$\hat{4}$–$\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$ (G Lydian). Coming to rest on $\hat{5}$, the version in "major" is the most stable.[452] Versions that interpret the melody as belonging to the

[451] Rodman notes that similar melodic processes may be found throughout Debussy's oeuvre, and describes the compositional technique as "creating a kaleidoscopic effect." "Thematic and Tonal Processes," 303. DeVoto specifically ties the practice to the evocation of recollection. *Veil of Tonality*, 59–60.

[452] This melodic gesture, $\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$, appears in mm. 12 (D major), 67 and 69 (E major), and 88 and 90 (F♯ major). Debussy uses the same pitch segment (in E major) as the final melodic ornament in the antepenultimate measure of "Jardins sous la pluie" from *Estampes* (1903).

lower part of the scale—which is true for the Aeolian, Lydian, and Phrygian settings—are more commonly used in conjunction with dysphoric poetic lines.

Figure 6.7. Reinterpretations of characteristic motive X ("song") in "De rêve"

mm.	Pentachord	Context	1st Note	Poem
6–10 11–13	G–A–B–C♯–D	B Aeolian ↓ D Major	$\hat{2}$ $\hat{7}$	line 3: "Of she who has just passed, head impearled"
30–33	G–A–B–C♯–D [lower voice]	G Lydian	♯$\hat{4}$	line 7: "All! They have passed"
42–44	B♭–C–D–E–F	*A Phrygian* *(or D Aeolian)*	*$\hat{5}$* *(or $\hat{2}$)*	line 14: "Alas! of all this, [nothing remains but a white frisson]"
67–70	A–B–C♯–D♯–E	E Major (later, with ♯$\hat{4}$ or ♭$\hat{5}$)	$\hat{7}$	line 22: "Some hands seem to brush souls"
71–75	D♭–E♭–F–G–A♭ [lower voice]	*? F Aeolian* *? E♭ Mixolydian*	*$\hat{2}$?* *$\hat{3}$?*	lines 23–24: "Hands so foolish / [Hands] so frail"
76–77	[B]–C♯–D♯–E♯–F♯ (fragment)	F♯ Major	($\hat{7}$)	n/a
80–81	[A]–B–C♯–D♯–E (fragment)	E Major	($\hat{7}$)	line 25: "used to sing for Them"
88–91	B–C♯–D♯–E♯–F♯	F♯ Major	$\hat{7}$	line 27: "My soul!"

Other harmonic contexts for this motive are less conclusively determined. The first setting (B Aeolian) suggests that the transposed version in bars 42–44 be heard in D Aeolian. However, the new harmonization, which oscillates between A minor and $e^{ø7}$, seems to indicate A Phrygian instead. This shift reinterprets the melody, making its first note $\hat{5}$. This version introduces the setting of line 14, "Alas! of all this, nothing remains but a white frisson." Its more ambiguous harmonization underscores the line's combination of lament and vestigial thrill.

The harmonization of the version in mm. 71–75 works against the grain of centricity. If the original setting is used as a model for interpretation, the melody could be heard "in" F Aeolian. The vocal line is coherent with this assumption (F–C–F in mm. 72–73). Alternately, the

melody could be heard "in" E♭ Mixolydian, if we allow for a delay of the tonic until beat 2. The harmonization does not conclusively confirm either of these interpretations. The progression ($g^{ø7}$–$E♭^{13}$–$G^{7(♭5)}$ [=$g^{ø7}$?]) once again relies on a common-tone pedal dyad (G–D♭; cf. G♯–E in bars 67–69), but the half-diminished quality of the first sonority in conjunction with mediant root relationships and extended-tertian tones disallows any stable sense of functional tonality or contextual centricity. This destabilized setting is precisely the version Debussy uses to set lines 23–24 (Mains si folles! / [Mains] si frêles!).

Directly following the first two presentations of the "song" motive in the piano (X, mm. 6–13), the setting of "Maintenant navrée, à jamais navrée" consists of fragmented and deformed versions of the same motive (both voice and piano, mm. 14–15). The fragment's opening contour and rhythm are reminiscent of the piano's melody in mm. 6 and 8, but the new chromatic embellishments and basically whole-tone collection are foreign to the "song" motive's original modality.[453] The repetition (with variation) of this melodic fragment underscores the verbal repetition and variation that are essential to this poetic refrain. The musical distance from the original and the sense of melodic deformation enact the poetic qualities of loss and ruin conveyed in the text. The interaction of musical agents contributes to the indirection of expression, as the original thematic "message" is simultaneously and inexplicably both garbled and shared.

Motive Y: Closural Function

Debussy uses a two-part characteristic motive (Y) to close stanzas 1 and 4. This "walking" motive has two parts. Its first half features an ascending quarter-note line in the bass with sixteenth-note figuration in the right hand (Y↑); its second half consists of meandering

[453] In addition, the piano complicates these passages by recalling the melodic gesture of m. 7 as a layered accompaniment (e.g., m. 14).

eighth-note octaves in the right hand over an accompaniment that gives low registral emphasis to beat 2 of the triple meter (Y~). Debussy's deployment of this motive is detailed in figure 6.8, below. At the close of the first stanza, this motive is played three times. Its persistent pedal on A is effaced in bar 25, as G^7 appears poised to inaugurate C major—which does not arrive. Instead, the A pedal is briefly reinstated (a deceptive move), but then quickly deflected through f♯ to B minor. Here, Y is liquidated, creating a transition to stanza 2.

Figure 6.8. Uses of characteristic motive Y in "De rêve"

mm.		Harmony	Comments	Poem
18–19	Y↑	A major	Pedal on A	n/a
20–21	Y~	$e–A^7–D^{(6/4)}$		Line 6: "They did not know…"
22–23	Y↑	$b^{ø2}–d^{(6/4)}$	Pedal on A	Line 6, cont.: "…how to signal to her…"
24–25	Y~	$d^{(6/4)}–e^7–d^6–G^7$	(until m. 25)	n/a
26–27	Y↑	A major		n/a
28–29	Y~	$A^{6/5}$–f♯–b	Motive liquidated	n/a
88–89	Y↑	F♯–d♯	Serves as tenor counterpoint to X	
90–91	Y~	$F♯–d♯^{ø6/5}–B^{4/3}$	Serves as tenor counterpoint to X Pedal on F♯	Line 27: "My soul! it is some…"
92–95	Y~	$g♯^7$ / $C♯^7$ osc.–F♯	Now extruded into upper voice; X serves as tenor counterpoint. Y fragmented and extended	Line 27, cont.: "…ancient dream that grips you!"
97, 99	Y~	F♯	No melody; only the accompaniment pattern emphasizing beat 2	n/a

At the close of the fourth stanza, which is also the end of the song, the recurrence of motive Y recaptures its rhetorical "ending" function. On this final F♯ plateau, Debussy layers the "walking" motive (Y) with the earlier and more pervasive "song" motive (X). Y is first

submerged as a lower voice in the texture, but then extruded into the upper voice as X takes the lower register. The codetta uses the accompaniment pattern from Y~, which gives emphasis to beat 2, as the figuration for the tonic (mm. 95, 97, and 99).

Motive Z: Chivalric Fanfare and Dotted Rhythm

This block is the most topically literal of the song's motives: the honorific flourish of the musical fanfare connects directly to the heraldic context of the chivalric age described in the poem. As Wenk describes, "Debussy employs a fanfare based on triadic harmonies at the points in the text which most directly evoke the days of knighthood."[454] Before its first complete appearance, the motive is fragmentally prefigured. The left-hand part of bars 49–52 increasingly resembles the fanfare melody in both rhythm and contour, so that when it appears in the upper voices of bar 53, the effect is one of recognition and even apotheosis, rather than of something new. When it arrives, the full-fledged melody is triadic, but incorporates semitone embellishments: $\hat{5}$–$\hat{5}$–$\flat\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$–$\hat{3}$–$\flat\hat{3}$–$\hat{3}$. These evocations of the minor mode imbue the fanfare with more expressive intensity than it would typically carry. The resulting trope of heroic fanfare with rhapsodic lament crystallizes the poem's nostalgia. This melodic line is absent in bars 55–56, but beats 3–4 of the motive's rhythm recur, now in diminution (Z*). The dotted eighth-note on beat 4 (see m. 53) becomes a dotted sixteenth-note on the second parts of the beat, animating an arpeggio figure in the alto voice (mm. 55–56).[455]

This four-measure block is the setting for line 17: "No one will ever again dedicate to them the pride of golden helmets." In this first appearance (m. 53 repeated in m. 54), the harmonic effect is of an imminent cadence or perhaps a retransition to a B-major tonic: the low pedal is F♯, and the primary harmony $B^{6/4}$. In the dotted-arpeggio bars (mm. 55–56), the implied

[454] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 204.
[455] This motivic profile (Z*) also appeared earlier in the song (mm. 42, 44), as an accompaniment to X just prior to the last phrase of stanza 2.

harmony is C♯^{9}–F♯^{13}, still over the F♯ pedal. Softer, thinner-textured, and an octave lower, the fanfare motive returns in bars 57–58: "Now tarnished! / Forever tarnished!" (lines 18–19). Although the reductions in tessitura, dynamic, and texture reflect the ruin in the poetic line, the memory of glory is captured by the return of B$^{6/4}$ along with the fanfare melody.

The fanfare melody reechoes in bars 58 and 59, its energy significantly abated. The animating triplet is liquidated, and Debussy indicates "*plus dim.*" (m. 58) and "*Plus lent*" (m. 59). In m. 59, the F♯ plateau is temporarily relinquished, and the entire texture is transposed to C major—a tritone turn effected through the quick G^{+} on the last beat of bar 58.[456] This second chivalric block begins the setting for line 20, "The knights are dead on the quest for the Grail!"[457] In comparison to the harmonic tension of the motive's first appearance—its poise on a nominally functional dominant—this block has an attenuated forward motion. The bass pedal is no longer $\hat{5}$ but $\hat{1}$ (m. 59) and then $\hat{3}$ (m. 61), and an interpolated measure (m. 60) broadens the phrase.[458]

In bars 62–64, the dotted arpeggio returns on white notes, although the pedal has reverted to F♯. Similarly, the pitches of the vocal line in bars 59–63 (C–D–E–D–C–D–E) continue to suggest C major, but the chord struck on beats 4 of 62–63 (and sustained into bar 64) suggests again an extended-tertian dominant on F♯. This bifurcation of tonal focus may be heard by analogy to the death of the quest: with this split focus and increasingly softer dynamics, any triumphant arrival in B (the passage's Holy Grail) is even less likely. The bitonal layering not only attenuates forward motion, it also serves as a harmonic metaphor for the poem's conflation of times, as the chivalric age is remembered in nostalgic reverie.

[456] This same tritone relationship (F♯–C) is emphasized by motive W (e.g., mm. 1–2, 47, 65–66).
[457] Nichols points out that "De rêve" uses only two alexandrines: lines 14 and 20. Because these alexandrines *don't* "occur continuously or as part of a regular pattern," they provide an expressive effect. Namely, the alexandrine adds gravitas to the "iconic sentiment" of line 20, "The knights are dead [. . .]." "Prosaic Debussy," 94–95.
[458] The thematic material in this measure—which appears nowhere else in "De rêve"— serves as the model for the first characteristic motive of "De fleurs," the third song in the suite (as noted in my earlier discussion of that song).

Interrupting the "song" motive (X), the chivalric fanfare and dotted arpeggio (Z) return in bars 78–79 for the setting of "time when swords" from line 25. Debussy then drops the fanfare element, using the dotted arpeggio to animate bars 82–85, which introduce and set "Strange sighs" (line 26). This attenuated motive returns again in the coda, as the figuration for the superposed dominant embellishments (mm. 96, 98). The figure and C♯ arpeggio recall what was first heard in 55–56. There, the implication was of V/V in B major. Here at the song's close, the C♯ arpeggio simply sounds as an embellishment of the concluding F♯ harmony; the dream of B major is irretrievable.

Pacing, Motive, and the Poetic Dream

Despite the largely regular phrasing of the piano part,[459] Debussy's changing use of piano interludes gives the song a varied and uneven flow. In stanza 1, these interludes create a quite sectionalized effect (see figure 6.6, above). A relatively long, four-bar interlude divides the first two poetic refrain lines (lines 1–2) from the body of the stanza.[460] A two-bar interlude separates the last two lines of stanza 1 (lines 5–6). Even more significant is the seven-bar interlude between stanzas 1 and 2. In contrast, the settings of stanzas 2 and 3 prioritize continuation and use the interlude much less: in both stanzas, only a one-bar interlude separates the last two lines (lines 13–14, and lines 19–20). Similarly, the interludes between stanzas 2–3 and 3–4 are also quite short (no interlude or one bar—depending on how the elision is counted—and two bars in length, respectively).

[459] Roger Nichols remarks that "the poet's dream is not expressed in the piano part through some vague, amorphous mush, but through two- and four-bar phrases. In the ninety-nine bars of the song this phraseology is broken only four times." "The Prosaic Debussy" in *The Cambridge Companion to Debussy*, ed. Simon Trezise (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 92.

[460] As noted in figure 6.6, in my counting of interlude measures, short vocal anacruses are treated as part of the next phrase.

Stanza 4 again makes liberal use of interludes; indeed, here Debussy creates gaps between all seven poetic lines *except* between lines 22–23. Rather than a long-breathed interlude (as in stanza 1), only a one-bar interlude divides the poetic refrain line from the body of stanza 4 (between lines 21 and 22). In this final stanza, Debussy even uses a one-bar interlude to separate the short-line refrain pair (this interlude is between lines 23 and 24); none of the three previous stanzas separate their short-line refrain pairs. United by a motivic idea in the piano and supported by crescendo, climbing tessitura, and increasing tempo, the setting of lines 23–25 (mm. 72–82) pushes towards its climax. In this context, instead of sectionalizing the setting, the short gaps in the vocal line may be read as a performance fragmented by ecstatic, overwhelming emotion.

Debussy deploys his thematic materials differently in each stanza. He sectionalizes the setting of stanza 1, not only through the use of relatively extensive interludes but also by employing, in order, three of the song's four characteristic motives (W, X, and Y). He bases stanza 2 almost entirely on the "song" motive (X), in both original and varied or fragmented forms. He introduces stanza 3 with the refrain motive (W), but thereafter the stanza is characterized by a new motive, the "chivalric" motive (Z). The final stanza is cyclic and integrative in its use of previous thematic material. Once again introduced by the refrain motive (W), the setting for this stanza quotes the "chivalric" motive (Z) in both its fanfare melody and dotted arpeggio, and uses the "song" motive (X) alone, as a fragment, and simultaneously with the closing motive (Y). Thus, the more thematically unified settings of the second and third stanza contrast with the sectionalized treatment of the themes in the first stanza, as well as with the layered, excerpted, rhapsodic treatment of themes in the fourth stanza.

In the first stanza, the dream—or wonderment, as "songer" is sometimes translated—is enacted in an extended pacing of the text. The musical thought process is through-composed and

compartmentalized, moving from one thematic island to another, each vocal section separated by extended interludes. Stanza 2 is more organically unified, as the speaker and music are wrapped in the memory of the women. The return of the refrain motive at the beginning of stanza 3 could suggest a return to consciousness as the music abandons the memories of stanza 2. But there is in fact no continued reconnection to the music of the first stanza. Instead, the setting of stanza 3 enters another absorbing dream, that of the chivalric age. The final stanza employs yet another rhetoric. Its stream-of-consciousness use of excerpts and layers mimics the processes of memory and nostalgia, recalling all previous characteristic motives and drawing them together in an expression of rhapsodic yearning.

Harmonic Design

In his exploration of Debussy's approaches to the past, Gregory J. Marion argues that the setting of "De rêve" unites poetic lines of remembrance with music that uses older, quasi-tonal procedures. These topical approximations of tonality evoke an older time without recreating it in whole, just as a memory does not recreate the past in all its particularity. In contrast, poetic lines concerned with present reality are set with post-tonal collections and processes.[461] Decades earlier, Wenk made a similar observation: "In this context of musical decadence Debussy is able to employ occasional passages of harmonic stability as a nostalgic evocation of the past."[462]

As we have seen, in "De rêve," F♯ is one of the principal agents in Debussy's harmonic rhetoric of suggestion. As part of the refrain motive (W), set with an augmented triad in an (almost) whole-tone scale, the note's context is post-tonal and symmetrical. Wenk connects the

[461] Gregory J. Marion, "Debussy and Recollection: *Trois aperçu*," *Music Theory Online* 13, no. 1 (March 2007): http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.07.13.1/mto.07.13.1.marion.html. See especially paragraphs 11–12.
[462] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 204.

whole-tone scale in "De rêve" to the poetic repetition of "golden" in these refrain passages.[463] When the "song" motive enters (X), its B-minor (Aeolian) context affirms the gradual reinterpretation of the originally non-functional F♯$^{+}$ triad as a functional dominant.[464]

In terms of Debussy's signatures, the two-sharp key signature at the opening of the work supports the first tonal arrivals on B minor (Aeolian) in bar 6 and D major, bar 11. And, despite multiple temporary pitch centers and non-tonal passages, this signature does not change until measure 53, where the harmonies suggest B major. The C-major signature in bar 59 (the Neapolitan of B minor? The tritone foil of F♯?) is then blurred in bar 62, with the return of the low F♯ pedal (the dominant?), and the two-sharp signature returns in bar 65. The final key signature, arriving in bar 88 for the setting of the final poetic line, is the six-sharp signature of F♯ major, the key that closes the work. Thus, after undergoing various reinterpretations, F♯ is finally established as a pitch center in its own right: the F♯/d oscillation of bar 3 is replaced by an F♯/d♯ oscillation in bars 88–89 and its original whole-tone context is supplanted by the major mode.

Similar to Debussy's later "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" (1904), the setting of "De rêve" may be understood as harmonically progressive, shifting from an interpretation of F♯ as a dominant to F♯ as stable pitch center.[465] This transformative process is completed for the last line, "Mon âme! c'est du rêve ancien que t'etreint!" The "grip" of the tonal system has transfixed the original F♯, which was not grounded in any key. It does not participate in the post-tonal language of the present; but stabilized as a key area, neither can it usher in the past, which had been most strikingly symbolized by B (B Aeolian in m. 6 ff., and B major in m. 53 ff.). It

[463] Ibid., 203. As we have seen, the motive underscores Debussy's refrain patterning at the beginnings of stanzas 3 and 4, and is therefore not exclusively connected to the "golden" imagery. See for example, mm. 65–66. The motive's symmetrical scales and structures are—vis-à-vis the poem setting—both burnished and sweet.
[464] This harmonic interpretation is consistent with Marion, "Debussy and Recollection," para. 12.
[465] In the rondel, the shift is from C♯ as a dominant to C♯ as a center.

fulfills the disappointment of the poem's sixth line: although dreaming of the past, it cannot beckon.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "De rêve"

In "De rêve," Debussy's exploration of nostalgia makes use of a multiply determined pitch center (F♯) to enact a vacillation not only between languages of past and present, but also between the charged act of beckoning the stable state of being. Some thematic elements and pacings of piano interludes clarify rhetorical functions of refrain and closure, whereas other thematic elements and pacings cut across poetic blocks to achieve an ecstatic effect. This deliberate confusion engenders a mistrust of formal musical cues, dissuading the listener from definitive interpretations of formal processes. The listener is caught in the dream state of poem and music, where real and surreal commingle. The lessons of the "song" motive (X) are similar. Here is a tune recalled rather literally, but against such changing contexts that its harmonic meaning and its sense of stability or instability are constantly being redefined. Like the women of the poem, the song motive is "frail," but powerful enough to "brush souls." It pervades the song like a reverberation that cannot be forgotten, a trace that cannot be firmly fixed—hence, a rhetoric of suggestion.

Paul Verlaine's "Les ingénus"

Verlaine published "Les ingénus" in 1869 as part of the *Fêtes galantes*. The poem was inspired by transmedial sources, as "Verlaine borrowed details of the scene depicted in 'Les ingénus' from prose descriptions of Watteau's paintings [. . .]. The originals are quite poetic in their imagery, even providing some of the exact words that Verlaine uses."[466] The work's alexandrine lines are paired in *rimes embrassées*, with a new set of end-rhymes in each stanza. This classical form lends the work a kind of "heighten[ed] awareness of repression, of an elegant, constrained society."[467] Yet, as Alfred Carter observes, the poem "has an accent unknown [. . .] to any world whatsoever before Verlaine."[468] Its form is not its only means of sound patterning. Barbara Meister argues that "Les ingénus" shows Verlaine's "inimitable touch" in its "elaborate alliterations." She describes in particular the repetition of "L" sounds in line 1 and "J" sounds throughout the first stanza.[469]

In the first two stanzas, the visuals blend concealment with revelation (see figure 6.9, below). The tangling of skirts and heels—with the help and hindrance of the breeze and the terrain—occasionally offer a glimpse of leg. Contending with over-attentive stinging insects, the beauties subsequently reveal flashes of nape, although further obscured by branches. The juxtaposition of struggle (line 1) or disquiet (line 6) with pleasure (line 8) further increases the tension in these stanzas. Here the "game of dupes" (line 4) is apparently run by nature (terrain, wind, insects, branches), with the help of items of apparel (high heels, skirts, collars). Revealed in brief glimpses, the beauties are apparently without agency, and the young fools enjoy their voyeuristic reward (line 8).

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[466] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 239.
[467] Susan Youens, "To Tell a Tale: Symbolist Narrative in Debussy's *Fêtes galantes II*," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (Fall/Winter 1987/1988): 183.
[468] Carter, *Paul Verlaine*, 34.
[469] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 240.

Figure 6.9. Paul Verlaine, "Les ingénus," Fêtes galantes, *1869*

	Les ingénus		The naive youths
1	Les hauts talons luttaient avec les longues jupes,	*a*	High heels would clash with long skirts,
2	En sorte que, selon le terrain et le vent,	*b*	So that, according to the terrain and the wind,
3	Parfois luisaient des bas de jambes, trop souvent	*b*	Sometimes lower legs shone out, too often
4	Interceptés—et nous aimions ce jeu de dupes.	*a*	Intercepted—and we loved this game of dupes.
5	Parfois aussi le dard d'un insecte jaloux	*c*	Sometimes also the sting of a jealous[470] insect
6	Inquiétait le col des belles sous les branches,	*d*	Disturbed the collar of the beauties beneath the branches,
7	Et c'était des éclairs soudains de nuques blanches,	*d*	And there were sudden flashes of white napes,
8	Et ce régal comblait nos jeunes yeux de fous.	*c*	And this delicious treat satisfied our young, foolish eyes.
9	Le soir tombait, un soir équivoque d'automne:	*e*	Evening would fall, an equivocal evening of autumn:
10	Les belles, se pendant rêveuses à nos bras,	*f*	The beauties, hanging dreaming on our arm,
11	Dirent alors des mots si spécieux, tout bas,	*f*	Said then words so specious, in a whisper [sotto voce],
12	Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne.	*e*	That our soul, since that time, trembles and is astonished.

[470] Meister explains that Verlaine intends the archaic sense of the word "jaloux," which means "ardently attached to rather than jealous of." "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 240.

The first ten lines of the poem use the past imperfect tense, suggesting repeated, continuous activity, a description of how it used to be.[471] This synthesized perspective is mirrored by the speaker's repeated reference to his cohort at the close of each stanza, and twice in the final stanza ("nous," line 4; "nos," line 8; "nos," line 10, and "notre," line 12). The poem's title names this group: The title's plural masculine noun ("Les ingénus") could also be translated as "The artless ones" or "The innocents" or even "The young fools." Thus, in "Les ingénus" the past is not remembered as singular, but as a conflation of times. The self is not remembered as a distinct personality, but as a collective.[472]

In the final stanza, Verlaine makes several important shifts. Here, evening falls, "an equivocal evening of autumn" (line 9). The poet's invocation of evening and autumn reify this stanza as the beginning of the end, since both are only one step removed from the nadirs of their respective cycles—one step before night, one step before winter.[473] The "equivocal" aspect of the autumnal evening emphasizes the ambiguities of this final stanza. Just what is "equivocal" is also unclear. Perhaps the speaker refers to the season of equinox, poised between longer days and longer nights; or maybe the temperature is neither crisp nor balmy; or perhaps there is mist or haze and it is not yet very dark. The beauties are "dreamy" (line 10) with fantasy or sleepiness, or perhaps both. Now, too, the beauties are no longer observed at a distance. Instead of perceiving the women via the sense of sight, the speaker now substitutes touch and hearing: "hanging" on the arms of the youths (line 10), the beauties speak (line 11).

[471] As Walker explains, "the use of the imperfect tense is noteworthy in 'Les Ingénus,' for with the title, it suggests a departed experience of youth which remains as a disturbing memory." "Visual and Spatial Imagery," 1011.
[472] Youens writes, the speaker "identifies his fate with that of others, an undifferentiated mass." "To Tell a Tale," 184.
[473] Stephan argues that "the mood which Verlaine most often associates with darkness is one of vague melancholy, of frustrated desire." "Verlaine and Baudelaire," 30.

In line 11, "the beauties said" is in the simple past tense, like a single event. The beauties' words were stunningly "specious" (line 11), that is, seemingly plausible but actually untrue, and perhaps deliberately misleading. In its hints at sophistry; "specious" serves as a kind of slant antonym for "ingenuous." It also multiplies the ambiguities of this stanza. Did the beauties intend to deceive, or are they simply caught up in daydream, ingénues themselves?[474] Is their insincerity a shock, a contrast to their beauty that has been sought through the first two stanzas? Did the young fools know these words were specious at the time—or have they only now realized it? For it is these words that made a difference, causing the soul to "tremble and be astonished" ever since, even into the present tense (line 12).[475] Along with the end of the day, and the end of the seasonal year, this stanza also suggests the end of youth and of naiveté. The speaker no longer uses the past tense, and the switch into the present tense emphasizes the distance between experience and recollection.

The poem uses little metaphor (only the "game of dupes" in line 4). Indeed, the girls are initially referenced in metonymic parts,[476] and the metonym is a hallmark of realism: this is no typical romantic *galanterie*.[477] Parks observes that the poem is "tongue-in-cheek, with a strong sense of self-satire,"[478] while Meister notes the sense of awestruck mystery conveyed by the last line of text.[479] The poem's quicksilver flicker of tone mimics the titillating play of chiaroscuro imagery in the first two stanzas. Despite the speaker's insistence on distancing self-awareness

[474] As Youens notes, while Verlaine paints the young men as the naive group, "in Debussy's cycle [that is, the *Fêtes galantes II*], both men and women alike are dupes, *un*knowing, but to different degrees. "To Tell a Tale," 183.
[475] Wenk explains, "The magic of these innocent moments endures to the present since, lying outside the realm of action, the specious words cannot be contradicted by later sophistication, a sophistication which brings participation and responsibility in a life which 'les ingénus' perceive only in glimpses, flashes, and fair-seeming appearances." *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 233.
[476] Youens, "To Tell a Tale," 183.
[477] Roman Jakobson famously argues that "the primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged, but it is still insufficiently realized that it is the predominance of metonymy which underlies and actually predetermines the so-called 'realistic' trend." Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, 2nd, rev. ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 91–92.
[478] Parks, *Music of Claude Debussy*, 191.
[479] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 242.

("jeu de dupes" [line 4], "jeunes yeux de fous" [line 8]), the soul still *trembles* (line 12). Mystical or mischievous, serious or satirical, "Les Ingénus" counterpoises the ephemeral, teasing flash of partial clarity with the lingering, transformative reverberation of doubt and astonishment.[480]

Debussy's Setting of Verlaine's "Les ingénus"

Written in 1904, "Les ingénus" is the first of Debussy's *Fêtes galantes II*. The modernism of this song is apparent in its prominent use of chromatic and symmetrical collections, as well as its pervasive ostinatos. Like the poem, Debussy's music makes a play of the tension between clarity and ambiguity. In places, the momentary clarity of exaggerated text-painting interrupts the song's equivocal field of modernist materials. Diatony and, at times, a flickering functional tonality are also important contributors to this "jeu de dupes." The composer confounds easy formal delineation by using a related family of motives; it is not always easy to tell whether a "new" section is best heard as contrast or continuation, liquidation or developing variation. Parks argues that "the form of the musical setting is tied closely to that of the poem: major partitions separate each pair of stanzas, which are surrounded by introductions and codettas."[481] Debussy's setting certainly reflects the poem's structures. But in many cases, his themes and collections also contend with Verlaine's boundaries, inscribing large-scale sectional breaks in alternate places, or fracturing stanzas into multiple parts.

The Piano's Characteristic Motive (U, with W and X)

The 3/8 meter might indicate a kind of dance, but Debussy's markings ("Modéré," pianissimo and "sweetly sustained") together suggest a movement that is subtle and sinuous rather than overtly active. The three-beat characteristic motive (U) unfolds major thirds, its legato upper melody descending F–E–D♭ (014). This measure-long pattern repeats, typically

[480] The astonishment of the final line ("Que notre âme depuis ce temps tremble et s'étonne") is structurally emphasized by the line's unusual caesura; it divides not into equal halves (6•6) but asymmetrically (8•4 or 4•4•4).
[481] Parks, *Music of Claude Debussy*, 287.

grouped into two-bar slurs, through bar 13. Twice (mm. 4 and 10), the second bar of the slur presents a variation of the motive that is also transposed down a fourth (in these instances the upper melody descends chromatically, C–B–B♭). The obsessive quality of the ostinato is simultaneously countered by occasional interjections from the left hand. The passage's inconstant counterpoint consists of two variations on the interval of a major second: filled-in chromatic ascents (W) and simultaneous, portato punctuations (X). While these patterns are constant, their ordering changes, as does their placement vis-à-vis the right-hand ostinato. As such, they enact the unpredictable glimpses described in Verlaine's poem, sights occasioned by the capricious forces and interactions of high heels and long skirts, wind, uneven ground, collars, and stinging insects.[482] Numerous small-scale crescendo and diminuendo markings imbue the passage with additional flashes of energy.

According to Meister, the piano figuration in "Les ingénus" depicts the "buzzing of the insects which troubled 'le col des belles'"[483] She also calls it "somnambulant," noting how "it seems to float, free from tonal moorings"[484] Certainly, the (014) trichord plays an important role in forestalling tonal grounding. Its use evokes a haunting, magical, uneasy atmosphere—just as it does in Schoenberg's passacaglia "Nacht" from *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). Harmonically, the motive suggests several perspectives. On the one hand, the ostinato composes-out a D♭ augmented triad, with the middle two notes of the measure serving as embellishing tones. On the other hand, the conjunction of the right-hand ostinato and the left-hand counterpoint repeatedly

[482] Pierre Maréchaux argues that the opening's "contrast of movements (up/down) and of shapes (linearity/discontinuity)" evokes the tradition of the piano scherzo together with its "aesthetic of contradiction." (La "lutte" modérée qui joue ici sur le contraste des mouvements (ascendant/descendant) et des formes (linéarité/discontinuité) rejoint toute une tradition pianistique [. . .]. Cette esthétique de la contradiction est celle du scherzo.) "L'écho des sens: Les 'melodies verlainiennes' de Claude Debussy," in *Verlaine: 1896–1996;Actes du colloque international des 6–8 juin 1996*, ed. Martine Bercot, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1998), 124.
[483] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 241.
[484] Ibid.

sounds A^7, a chord with possible tonal implications (final beats of bars 5, 8, and 12).[485] But the chord's potential dominant function is never fully realized: the vocal line in bars 6–8 could be heard as descending through a D-minor scale, but it is diverted at the last from any confirming tonic (A–G–F–E–D♭ = $\hat{5}$–$\hat{4}$–♭$\hat{3}$–$\hat{2}$–$\hat{7}$?). Similarly, while the right hand "resolves" the chordal seventh to F on the downbeat of each subsequent measure, this "resolution" sounds simultaneously with the reiterated G (mm. 6, 9, and 13). Thus, because no single center is established, the ostinato itself serves as both stabilizing and destabilizing force. Unsettling in its lack of center, but fixed in its repetitions, the motive is mesmerizing.

Contending with Verlaine's Form: The "jeu de dupes"

Bars 14–15 interrupt the texture motivically, harmonically, and syntactically. The motive is truncated and stalled, the harmonies clearly describe major triads, and the pitch collection suggests an impending cadence to D♭. Instead, IV oscillates with V as the voice sings "too often / Intercepted!" By standing as a rhetorical foil to the preceding music, this passage enacts the meaning of the text ("Intercepted!").[486] At the same time, by setting "too often" (end of line 3) and "Intercepted!" (beginning of line 4) to music that is seamlessly contiguous, Debussy downplays Verlaine's enjambment, which poetically "intercepts" its text. That is, whereas Verlaine's enjambment pairs a continuous thought with a formal disjunction, Debussy's setting makes the continuation of the thought seem natural. In Debussy's musical treatment, the enjambment loses its poetic tension.

[485] Of course, the augmented harmonies built on D♭ and A♮ are enharmonic equivalents.
[486] Wenk, *Claude Debussy and the Poets*, 243.

The song's second section (B on the diagram) begins in bar 16. Here Debussy's use of thematic and collectional materials suggests a distortion of Verlaine's form.[487] Instead of breaking between stanzas, the new passage sets the last line of stanza 1 as well as the first two lines of stanza 2. While the new ostinatos shows clear similarities to the original characteristic motive—the use of broken major thirds, the three-beat length—the differences are more important. With a low-register, staccato roll on each downbeat, and grace-note embellishments on beats 2 and 3, the musical topic of this passage is more stereotypically dancelike. Even the voice participates in the new texture, with a grace note and staccatos playfully enacting a "game of fools" (m. 19).

This section is also differentiated from the first by means of its pitch collection. Every note of this ostinato belongs to the whole-tone scale (0,2). As Parks observes, "Whole-tone passages in 'Les Ingénus' are used to set portions of the text that evoke a sort of madness and excitement"[488] Yet this collection suggests different functions as the section unfolds. In mm. 16–19 the left-hand strums an A♭ augmented triad on each downbeat, the alto voice walks upward by whole steps (C–D–E), and the upper part oscillates between C and A♭. Thus, despite the collection's symmetry, the use of the repeating A♭–C–E triad as a formal marker also evokes a functional role—that of dominant to the D♭$^{+}$ suggested by the song's opening passage. Later in this passage, the whole-tone collection serves as a boundary structure. The voice text-paints "Disturbed" by singing G♮ as the piano adds F♮, notes that do not belong to the (0,2) whole-tone collection (m. 24).[489]

[487] As we shall see, while motivic and collectional parameters clearly initiate the beginning of a new section in m. 16—before the end of stanza 1—Debussy's setting uses other elements to reflect the actual division in the poem between stanzas 1 and 2.
[488] Parks, *Music of Claude Debussy*, 191.
[489] These notes (especially F♮) recur in mm. 25–26, thereby continuing to dismantle the collectional stability of the B section.

Figure 6.10. Music and poetry in "Les ingénus"

m.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
motive	U		U (terraced)		U		U		U (terraced)		U			U′ (truncated)	
			W (F)	W (D♭)	X (ascending)			X (ascending)		W (D♭)	W (F)	X (descending)			
voice						A–G–F–E–D♭ D♭$^{+}$? D minor?				W (D♭)	W (F)				
harmony	(014); D♭$^{+}$													D♭: IV–V–IV osc.	
form	**A**: Modéré; doucement sostenu; pianissimo with measure-long crescendos and diminuendo markings													**Tag**: *più pp, cedez*	
line							*1*			*2*			*3*		*4a*
stanza							Stanza 1								

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
RH: alto C–D–E ost; soprano C–A♭ ost. LH in 3-beat ost with grace notes				(No LH)	RH continues 3-beat ost. pattern; LH begins 2-beat ost. with register cross-over					D–E–F (seq)
			grace on "dupes"			Higher tess. C–B♭–A♭		G! (not in WT)		
WT (0,2); A♭$^{+}$ (=V?)								d^{ø7}? F minor?		
B: a tempo; piano . . .										cresc.
	4b					*5*		*6*		
	Stanza 1, cont.					Stanza 2				

27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
U″: descending scale (1 octave)				Ascending scale (2 octaves)			Ascending: C–D–E–F		
G♭/D♭ in bass							Descending: C–B♭–A♭		
				f-minor arp		B♭-arp	sus F5 (apex)		
G♭ major		G♭^{13}?		E♭ major?: (ii?) V . . .			vi–V–ii6/5 ost. . . .		
A′ (truncated): Peu à peu animé, *mf*				**C**: Toujours animé, *p*, cresc. . . . *f*			*dim.*	Retenu, *p*	
7				*8*					
Stanza 2, cont.									

37	38	39	40	41	42
U (harmonic)		U (harmonic)		U (harmonic), cut	
W (F)	W (D♭)	W (F)	W (D♭)	W (F)	
		U′		U′ (rhyth dim)	
(014); D♭$^{+}$					
A″: Le double moins vite, *pp* retenu Octave higher than A					
		9			
		Stanza 3			

42	43	44	45	46	47	48
Y′	Y′	Y″	Y″	Y″		
RH: C/C ost LH: pedal		RH: begins 2-beat ost (C–D) LH: pedal + grace		RH: cont. 2-beat ost		grace
				A–G–F–E–D (cf. mm. 6–8)		C–D
	WT (0,2); A♭$^{+}$ (V of D♭?)			G^{13} . . .		(C?)
B′ {m. 42 elision!} *più pp* Lent, *p* Octave higher than B						
	10			*11*		*12*
Stanza 3, cont.						

49	50	51	52	53
Z	Z	Z		
Low register for piano (“tout bas”?) G♭/D♭ in bass				
U′	U′ (rhythmic aug)			
G♭ Minor: i . . .			V^{+} (=D♭$^{+}$)	
A″: *pp*	*più pp*	*ppp sf pp*		
12, cont.				
Stanza 3, cont.				

Notes:

U (plus **W**, **X**): the principal characteristic motive. Consists of a right-hand ostinato (U) with irregular left-hand interjections (W and X)

Y: derivative of the principal characteristic motive. Defines the B section. Consists of a two-layer ostinato in the right-hand with first a three-beat, then a two-beat accompaniment in the left hand

Z: syncopated right-hand chords with left-hand oscillations from G♭ to D♭. Evokes a popular style

The shaded row tracks elements in the vocal part

Poetic lines are counted at the downbeat (without anacrusis), except for the significant anacrusis for line 12 in m. 48

Although the new ostinatos continue in the right hand (Y), Debussy marks the beginning of stanza 2 with a measure of interlude (m. 19) and a new, two-beat ostinato in the left hand. The resulting conflict—between the three-beat right-hand and two-beat left-hand ostinatos—is magnified by the crossing of the left hand over the right with every other note. These measures set Verlaine's description of stinging insects that annoy the women's necks, and it is tempting to hear a darting insect in the left-hand's staccato crossing-over. But the metric tension of the passage also highlights the setting's increasing disquiet and intensity. While the opening of the song was more languid, its articulation and accompanying patterns typically suggesting two-bar groups, the B section's one-bar groups feel more directed, as though impatient.[490]

Turbulence and Diatony

As we shall see, the setting of stanza 2 is made increasingly turbulent by conflicting fault lines and continuities. Debussy sets lines 6–8 to three different musical textures. At the same time, various similarities in the vocal melody alternately suggest pairings between lines 6 and 7, and lines 7 and 8. In measure 27, the collectional shift to G♭ major coincides with a brief recall of the song's principal characteristic motive (A′ on the chart). But the ending homology between the vocal phrases for lines 6 and 7—in particular the similarities between the rhythms and basic contours of mm. 25–26 and mm. 28–30—creates a continuity that contends with the piano's collectional and thematic disjunctures. While Meister argues that "a firmly diatonic passage for 'des éclairs soudains de nuques blanches' is another musical metaphor, this time for the moment of clarity glimpsed under the shadowy branches,"[491] mm. 27–30 don't participate in an obvious tonal trajectory. The vertical harmonies of the B section highlighted first $A♭^{+}$, then $d^{ø7}$ or even F

[490] In his study of metric organization in this setting, Parks observes that there is a "tendency, on all three metric levels, for longer durations to appear closer to the beginning of the song rather than toward the end." *Music of Claude Debussy*, 289.
[491] Meister, "Interaction of Music and Poetry," 242.

minor. In light of A♭$^{+}$, the G♭ of m. 27 might suggest a continuation of the previous IV–V (G♭–A♭) oscillation in mm. 14–15. In light of d^{ø7}, E♭ or G^{7} would be the more logical tonal continuations. Even in F minor, G♭ would be a less-expected Neapolitan turn. Thus, instead of completing a compelling tonal progression, contrapuntal chromaticism (F♮ in the piano and G♮ in the voice) simply converges onto G♭. The G♭ harmony is weighted with extended tertian partials that simultaneously herald a tonic that never arrives (as V^{7} of C♭) and offer the sensuous enjoyment of the expanded sonority itself. More than simple clarity, then, the way Debussy sets up this diatonic passage highlights the surprise of the present moment, together with its sense of pleasure ("treat") and continued anticipation.

Debussy expands the length of the vocal phrases for lines 7 and 8 (mm. 27–34). These new, four-bar phrases are more rhapsodically song-like, contrasting with the shorter two- and three-bar phrases that characterize the rest of the setting (and the piano interlude in mm. 35–36 further lengthens the setting of line 8 to six measures). These longer-breathed phrases provide an expanded temporal immediacy and romantic ardor to the description of sights so fleetingly glimpsed. Despite this similarity of pacing, line 8 is given yet a new musical texture (C on the chart), as Debussy closes stanza 2 with a dramatic push to a climactic arrival on "fous" (m. 33ff.). Beginning in bar 31, the ascending scalar motion, thickened texture, dominant-seventh harmony, and markings of both crescendo and "toujours animé" activate every parameter to highlight a musical arrival. The poetic line beginning the ascent is "and this treat satisfied us" (line 8), but despite the multiple musical markers of this arrival, the setting is harmonically ironic. Debussy once again signals a move to E♭—this time more strongly—by providing a new, three-flat signature (m. 31) and a clear B♭^{7} dominant (mm. 31–33). But in contrast to the "satisfaction" of the poem, the implied cadence on E♭ never arrives. First it is seemingly delayed.

When the dominant moves to C minor/A♭ major (m. 34), we are likely to hear this as a deceptive or plagal delay of the authentic cadence. Then, the outward expansion to E♭ which might finally have been realized in bar 37 is ultimately thwarted: rather than ascend to G and complete an arrival to E♭, the F in the soprano register of the piano part is captured by a D♭ augmented triad as Debussy swerves into a varied return of the opening ostinato.

Stanza 3: Return to the Original Motive

As the final stanza returns the initial motives, the three-flat signature is cancelled and the denied arrival to E♭ is harmonically forgotten. But the sense of stasis—the stuck energy—is apparently translated to the tempo, which Debussy marks "Le double moins vite." Enhancing this slow-motion effect of augmentation, the original motive is now given a thicker, harmonized texture, as if this coagulation served to slow down the motion. The harmonization also crystallizes the motive's atonal identity. Its bass line tracing chromatic ascents,[492] the vertical harmonies first emphasize augmented sonorities while alternating between whole-tone collections (mm. 37, 39, and 41), then sound $d♭^{M7}$–$G^{4/3}$–e♭ in succession (mm. 38, 40, and the start of m. 42). Now played an octave higher, the motive is removed from the more accessible tessitura it had originally occupied. When B returns (m. 42), its motion is also stilled; the dance- or minstrel-like rolled chords, staccatos, and grace notes are replaced by a sustained tone-cluster pedal in the bass. Thus, Debussy's variation of the reprise continues to "compose-out" the stuck or truncated harmonic energy of the preceding passage. Applied to the original characteristic motives, these changes imbue the musical return with a sense of stagnation and alienation. These musical changes also parallel the changes of Verlaine's final stanza, which marks the coming of evening by changes of tense and tone.

[492] The ascending lines are F–G♭–G (mm. 37, 39, 41) and D♭–D–E♭–E (mm. 38, 40, 42).

There are several other kinds of musical echoes in the setting of the final stanza. The vocal line on "Le soir tombait, un" follows the pitches D♭–C–A–A♭–G (mm. 39–40). This same melodic line is treated to rhythmic diminution and reused for the completion of the poetic line, "[équi-]voque d'automne" (m. 41). Disrespecting boundaries of clause and even word, the repetition suggests the resonance experienced by the speaker. In the piano, Debussy also recalls both the ostinato (m. 42ff.) and the whole-tone collection (mm. 43–45) that characterized the B section. This time, rather than "clearing" to G♭,[493] Debussy continues with an extended G-major harmony (mm. 46–48). At the same time, the signal poetic phrase "[a-]lors des mots si spécieux, tout bas," which initiates the poetic *volta* at the close of the final stanza, is set to the descending line A–G–F–E–D (m. 46–47). Debussy thus marks the import of these "specious words" by recalling—with a striking difference—the opening vocal line (A–G–F–E–D♭, mm. 6–8). The use of D♮ as the endpoint of this vocal phrase is marked; since it only appeared as a passing tone in the opening measures,[494] its use here as a cadence point sounds indeed "specious."

The Rhetoric of Suggestion in "Les ingénus"

The accompaniment of the final line is clearly separated from the preceding passage, and the poetic *volta* is strongly emphasized in this setting. Debussy indicates "Lent," the slowest tempo of the work (m. 48). The piano introduces a new, syncopated ostinato with tonic-dominant oscillation on G♭ minor (m. 49; Z on the diagram). Evoking, perhaps, an accompaniment style belonging to popular music, this textural "realism" accompanies the poem's only line in the present tense. At the same time, the tonal focus of the final section implies a connection between the settings of lines 7 (G♭ major) and line 12 (G♭ minor). Both diatonic passages are tonally

[493] Compare with mm. 27–30.

[494] In mm. 1–15, D♮ occurs three times: in the piano part of m. 4, and simultaneously in voice and piano in m. 10. In all cases, it appears as a passing tone. In contrast, D♭, which closes the setting of the original vocal line (m. 8), sounds in every measure of the opening section (mm. 1–15).

unprepared, their triadic clarity at odds with syntactical chromaticism. Both passages are also related thematically to the opening of the piece. In m. 27, the piano states a transposed version of the characteristic motive (V). In m. 49, and in augmented form in mm. 50–51, the vocal melody reprises the (014) fragment on F–E–D♭, an echo both of the original characteristic motive and the ending of the first vocal line (m. 8). Vis-à-vis the poem, the musical rhyme is ambiguous: is the trembling of the soul (line 12) the lingering, dysphoric foil to the momentary pleasure of glimpsed napes (line 7)? Or is the differentiation of major and minor modes Debussy's way of contrasting the present ("since that time") and the remembered past?

The final harmony, an augmented triad, may be heard as V^+ in the context of G♭ minor. Then, too, it is a recapturing of the $D♭^+$ harmony associated with the song's first motive. This ending, on a harmony that can be construed as dominant function (a continued musical "trembling" to enact the text), bears similarity to Debussy's strategy in "De rêve" and "L'ombre des arbres." All three songs begin with a triadic harmony whose initial context is non-functional and post-tonal ($C♯^7$ in "L'ombre des arbres, $F♯^+$ in "De rêve," and $D♭^+$ in "Les ingénus"). All three eventually reinterpret this chord as a functional dominant, and all three songs finally end with the harmonies of their beginnings. "De rêve" transforms its $F♯^+$ to F♯ major, making it a clear member of the diatonic language, and removing its dominant instability. Similarly, "L'ombre des arbres" transforms $C♯^7$ into C♯—but this apparent stability is called into question by the harmony's interaction with topical tonality and by its association with past events rather than current reality.[495] In contrast, the final harmony of "Les ingénus" is not transformed. This multiply determined sonority can be read as non-tonal (a return to the beginning state), or as

[495] Another point of similarity between the two earlier songs is the pattern of their opening characteristic motives. Hepokoski names "L'ombre des arbres" and "De rêve" as his two examples of the "modal/chordal opening" that employ a two-chord (rather than the more typical four-chord) pattern. "Formulaic Openings in Debussy," 48.

endlessly pointing to a lost G♭ tonic.[496] Musically sphinxlike, the arabesques of "Les ingénus," and the double identity of its final harmony, conspire together to suggest the disquiet of the "trembling" soul. Although the song's structural fault-lines and echoes interfere with the poem's form, the work's thematic and harmonic elements sustain the poem's still-resonant past, ambiguous and unresolved.

[496] There is also an oblique similarity between Debussy's settings of "Les ingénus" and "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau." Both poems describe a connection between the past and the present, an implied cause and effect. In "Le temps" Debussy repeatedly destabilizes F♯, eventually asserting its C♯ dominant as the new, stable tonic. The same harmonies—or rather, their enharmonic equivalents—are in play in "Les ingénus." Yet the D♭$^{+}$ harmony at the end of the song is not clearly transformed in its function. Rather than focus on change, the harmonic elements of the setting suggest an unresolved tension between past and present.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The preceding analysis chapters explored Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion, organized around four poetic aspects: repetition and change, confinement and escape, real and surreal, and the elusive past. As these chapter titles indicate, tension is a critical aspect of this rhetoric, which pursues an artistically oppositional "pays chimérique."[497] And as we have seen, Debussy productively contraposes not only text and music, but one musical parameter with another, at times offering differing approaches to the same parameter within a single work or passage. Indeed, confusion emerges as an expressive effect, purposefully elusive. Precisely because of these oppositions, component strands are not as rhetorically meaningful when disentangled: Debussy's approaches to thematicity, temporality, and agency must be understood in their close interrelationships. With this final chapter I identify critical strategies in the rhetoric of suggestion as integrated with their expressive effects, and not simply those effects that emerged in association with general poetic themes but also those that cut across such boundaries. The latter highlight systemic compositional practices and point to more specific effects embedded within a variety of larger contexts.

Relationships between Text and Music

As I have said, one of the signal techniques in Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion is his tensional approach to song. Certainly, his settings support the poetry in obvious ways, through his use of genre, text-painting, topic, form, and/or rhetoric. For instance, he uses the pastoral expressive genre for "Je tremble en voyant ton visage," an echo of the poem's classical pastoral mode. In "Le jet d'eau," he references the fountain's arc through simple text-painting: ascending

[497] Debussy, quoted in Dayan, "Nature, Music, and Meaning," 218.

and descending melodic contours embody the descriptive poetic lines they set. In "Rondeau," he uses a berceuse topic that musically echoes the rocking and cradling described in the poem. Examples of structural homologies include the music of Debussy's 1882 "En Sourdine," which echoes the poem's arch form, and the setting of "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," in which a bipartite musical refrain sets the bipartite poetic refrain. In "De rêve," the speaker describes fragile women whose memories nevertheless continue to haunt him; rhetorically embodying this poetic subject, Debussy's musical setting recycles a single motive against changing contexts that redefine the motive's tonal stability. Similarly, in "Les ingenus," musical changes for the setting of the final stanza seem to reflect the poet's shifts of tense and tone.

And yet, the composer often designs settings that contend with his chosen poems. At times, we hear Debussy contradicting the poems' narratives through excerption or text-painting. In "Je tremble," the composer sets only an excerpt from the full-length poem. And, whereas the complete poem describes a successful romance, Debussy's excerpt ends with ambiguity. In "Les ingénus," the speaker describes satisfaction just as Debussy's setting delays and ultimately thwarts tonal arrival. Such tensions or contradictions are also repeatedly expressed through the songs' musical forms. In "Recueillement," for example, Debussy's rondo patterning does not respect Baudelaire's formal divisions. In "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the vocal refrain appears to act as a harmonic catalyst rather than a point of recurring stability. In "De fleurs," Debussy's setting of his own poem is arch-structured—but the musical setting nests several more layers of palindromic patterning than occur in the poem. In "L'ombre des arbres," Debussy sets the poem's two stanzas with two musical sections—but unlike the poem's more even proportions, the music for the second stanza is grossly exaggerated in length. We thus find

in Debussy's oeuvre a chiaroscuro play between music/text agreement and argument that creates a sense of uncertainty.

Musico-Structural Cues and Conflicts

In addition to both evoking and disrupting the conventional notion of text/music agreement, Debussy also often deploys conflicting musical structures within the same song. Typically, he uses such conflicts to achieve evocations of memory and the subconscious, or to otherwise heighten a passage's expressive force. In "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," Debussy begins with a two-part characteristic motive in the piano, but then does not reliably connect this with the two-part vocal/poetic refrain: the formal elements are misaligned, thereby suggesting the resonance—and unpredictable recompositions or reconstitutions—of memory. In "De rêve," the confusing manipulation of piano interludes and thematic elements evokes a dreamlike temporality by undermining the clarity of formal cues.

In his 1882 setting of "En sourdine," Debussy blends strophic variations and arch form, thereby imbuing the song with two different kinds of musical "motion in place." This double depiction of musical stasis, an uneasy meld of rhetorically similar yet structurally different models, creates an eerily serene context for the poem, simultaneously familiar and unnatural. In "Recueillement," he begins by evoking the operatic genre of recitative-aria, but then pits this against a rondo form. The conflict between these two genre/form models allows him to manipulate listener expectations in such a way that the song concludes with intensified dramatic power.

Tonal Causes and Effects

Debussy also manipulates harmonic systems for rhetorical effect. While his earlier songs are more likely to use traditional tonality, his later songs do not reliably shun its use. One of the

techniques of his rhetoric of suggestion is to invoke the tonal system's ability to signal continuation, and then both confirm and deny this functioning. Major-minor ("dominant") sonorities often appear in apparently non-functional oscillations. For instance, "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" features a whole-tone oscillation between D♭^{7} and C♭^{7}. But this pattern ushers in G♭, and C♭ is thereafter reclaimed as a dominant to F♭. On the other hand, the dominant E^7 of "Recueillement" is never resolved to A, instead used as part of a thematized deceptive resolution. In other instances where Debussy evokes tonal functioning, the suggested "resolution" is markedly delayed, appearing as a significant chord or key area only later in the piece. "Le jet d'eau exhibits this type of syntactic stratification. Because of the intervening gap, the reference to tonality is subverted: although the dominant function has been "activated," traditional tonality does not fully apply. However, implicative harmonies are able to signal "at a distance," despite spans of disconnection.

As we saw in the analysis of "Les ingénus," "De rêve," and "L'ombre des arbres" (poetically linked by the "elusive past"), all three songs begin with a triadic harmony treated post-tonally but later reinterpreted as a functional dominant. And yet, in each case, the work concludes with a return to the same initial harmony. In contrast, the progressive tonality of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," iteratively transforms its dominant into a (nominally) final tonic. "Je tremble en voyant ton visage" applies multiple tonal functions to the pitch F♭/E♮: modal inflection, leading-tone to F, harmonic plateau. While pitch reinterpretation is a classic element of functional tonality, Debussy often chooses unlikely scale degrees for this work, stabilizing the Neapolitan or leading tone. We see this particularly in his moments of the musically surreal, as found in "Spleen" and "Recueillement."

Thematicity and Topicality

Debussy harnesses a variety of topical references—including the pastoral, the music of Spain and (an imagined) ancient Greece—and performance genres such as dance and opera. He also creates emergent meanings through original tropological blends. For instance, in "Le jet d'eau," he tropes the berceuse topic with not only elements representing water and melancholy but also and contrasting elements representing dancing and wind. In "Recueillement," he combines orientalism with the nocturne. Because Debussy's tonality is not—or not always—thoroughgoing, it can also cue associative meanings. By evoking past or traditional musical practice, Debussy can treat brief moments of functional tonality as *topical*, signaling lucidity, naiveté, or nostalgia. And yet, in such cases, precisely because these references are not connected to a reliable common practice, they also connote fragility. For example, in "De fleurs," to set the poetic line about "disentangling," Debussy uses a descending fifth "cadence" that contrasts with the non-functional oscillation of the previous music. But in its poetic context, this traditional tonality bespeaks an inaccessible past. In "L'ombre des arbres," Debussy undermines the perceived stability of the song's close, in part, by replicating the ii–V–I authentic cadence used earlier in the work—where it "confirmed" the "wrong" tonic. Here again, Debussy's topical use of tonality compromises the stability that was, ostensibly, inherent in traditional harmonic formulas.

Debussy often deploys topics oppositionally. In order to represent distinctions between agencies or times, for example, he uses topics to articulate between human and nature ("Le jet d'eau"), conquest and failure ("Placet futile"), and past and present ("Les ingénus" and "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau"). In order to create moments of the musically surreal, Debussy pits topic against tonality, thereby subverting traditional harmonic or topical functioning.

Examples include the topically legitimized stability of the off-tonic opening in "Spleen" and the harmonically dissociated arabesque in "Je tremble en voyant ton visage."

Indeed, the simultaneous evocation and undermining of the pastoral mode is one of Debussy's favorite strategies. Raymond Monelle denies the possibility of a musical *fête galante* topic, describing the evocation of the syrinx as Debussy's signal contribution to new pastoral topics.[498] And yet Monelle also notes that Debussy creates a "fin-de-siècle pastoral," in which

> the atmosphere of slightly alienated fantasy influences Debussy's style, removing his pastoral works from the old tradition. An ancient world, pagan, mysterious, sunlit, is evoked. It may, indeed, be a pastoral world. But the image of innocence, of happy love, is rendered crystalline, is slightly colored with risk.[499]

I argue that, endemic to the composer's rhetoric of suggestion, Debussy's particular use of the pastoral—the strategies that produce this "fin-de-siècle pastoral"—involve tensional models. These tensions result in two rhetorical inflections of the pastoral mode.

The Sublime Pastoral

First: the sublime pastoral. In some instances, although Debussy uses typical pastoral undercutting of a romantic climax (through soft dynamics and counterintuitive rubato, for example), he simultaneously elevates the same passage through extreme register and diminution, creating an effect of supercharged intimacy and elusive wonder. The sublime pastoral is particularly important in Debussy's "Le jet d'eau," where it emerges in several instances over the course of the song. We also find this union of intensity and intimacy in the 1882 setting of "En sourdine."

The history of the *mélodie* reveals a slightly different approach to the musical ecstatic among nineteenth-century French composers preceding Debussy. In describing Henri Duparc's

[498] Raymond Monelle, *Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 263; 265–67.
[499] Ibid., 267.

depiction of ecstasy in his 1874 setting of "Ecstase," Stacy Moore claims that "instead of the immediacy of Wagner's expression [of the ecstatic], Duparc—and his poet, Jean Labor—offer distance. In fact, a polarity between action and intensification on the one hand, and stasis and distancing on the other, is central to both the poem and music . . . ."[500] Moore includes "broken barriers, the piano's transcendence of the voice, . . . the diminished role of language," and the song's "structural obfuscations" as four important markers of Duparc's musical ecstatic.[501] As such, this earlier approach does not seem to so clearly juxtapose distance with simultaneous intensity, as does Debussy's sublime pastoral.

The Deceptive Pastoral

Perhaps even more significant is the second subtype, Debussy's deceptive pastoral. At times, although adhering to many of the traditional musical-pastoral elements (e.g, moderate tempo, major key, pedal points, parallel sixths and thirds, simple harmonies, etc.), his settings create unexpected fissures in the very placidity which should fundamentally characterize the pastoral mode. The deceptive pastoral is commonly found in Debussy's settings of poems describing (typically doomed) efforts to make love permanent. For instance, the deceptive pastoral is an important element in "Rondeau," where Debussy stages rhetorical breaks into subdominant space. We also experience the deceptive pastoral in "Spleen," where Debussy uses the pastoral mode to falsely stabilize the Neapolitan key area, as if it were the song's governing tonic. In a sense, "Placet futile" participates in the same deceptive subtype. The speaker's description of romantic triumph is associated with the pentatonic scale, as if we were hearing the piping of Pan in ancient Arcadia. But when the ending of the song suggests romantic rejection, this earlier passage is revealed as merely wishful: in truth, Arcadia is inaccessible. The deceptive

[500] Stacy Kay Moore, "Words without Songs and Songs despite Words: Poetry and Music in the French *Mélodie*" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2001), 229.
[501] Ibid., 235, 237.

pastoral is a double-edged sword, simultaneously signaling persuasive prowess and self-delusion on the part of the protagonist.

Thematicity in Constructions of Temporality and Agency

We have seen that Debussy's characteristic motives function both topically and structurally. In addition, his developmental techniques are also connected with constructions of temporality and agency. And, in many cases, the "separate" strands of temporality and agency may be implicated in the same technique. In the next several paragraphs I explore Debussy's manipulation of thematic materials toward several ends: as leitmotifs in evocations of the speaker's (or reader's!) subconscious and memory; as signals of agential relationships including influence; as a means of recording and manipulating temporal flow; and to construct alternate temporalities.

Leitmotif, Intertextuality, and Layering

We have seen that Debussy's motives are often used leitmotivically and as "speaking melodies"[502] that reiterate thoughts as if subconsciously repeated—for example, in "En sourdine" (1882), "Rondeau," "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte," and "Le jet d'eau." In "Spleen," Debussy similarly submerges the *piano's* original characteristic motive. Intertextual borrowing exaggerates the expressive force of the repeated material, suggesting a stronger "memory" that has recalled the melody over a longer span of time. For example, "De fleurs" adapts its opening characteristic motive from a passage in "De rêve," a move that not only enhances the sense of the songs as a related cycle, but also sets up a backdrop of hopelessness with its implied poetic echo ("The knights are dead"). The reuse of a significant melody from the 1882 setting lends poignancy to the 1892 setting of "En sourdine," suggesting as it does both temporal confusion (a reference, simultaneously, to musical past and poetic future) and ventriloquized despair. The

[502] Kramer, "Speaking Melody," 127.

reuse of the opening material from "Rondeau" as the opening material of "Le jet d'eau" immediately connects Baudelaire's poem with music evoking both intimacy and loneliness.

Another related process is that of thematic layering, where multiple characteristic motives are sounded simultaneously, giving a sense not only of grand finale, but also of a particular perspective on time. For example, the layers at the close of "De rêve" recall processes of memory and nostalgia. Similarly, the layers at the close of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" embody the poem's reiteration of the temporal cycle of before and after.[503] In "Le jet d'eau," it is the layering and integration of opposing thematic features in the final refrain that enhances the setting's Symbolist trope. In these songs, Debussy's leitmotivic and intertextual quotation of thematic material appears to be associated with subconscious workings, dysphoric foreshadowing, temporal confusion, or temporal merging.

Relationships and Influence

In "Le jet d'eau" and En sourdine" (1892), Debussy's thematic writing shows a heterophonic relationship between the voice and piano. The two parts appear independent, while also influenced by one another. Perhaps the most notable use of this technique is in "Je tremble," where the voice finally joins in with sigh figures that previously belonged to the piano, as if the piano's agency could coax a sympathetic resonance from the voice. In all three songs, the entwined or persuasive thematic writing embodies the relationships between characters described in the texts. For the most dramatically persuasive of these three texts ("Je tremble") Debussy employs thematic writing that particularly emphasizes the relationship and interactions between (or among) characters.

Recording and Manipulating Time's Passage

[503] Richard Parks describes a "ternary-derived archetype" in which the "last section synthesizes characteristic features of the first two" (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 222). While "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau" is nominally ternary, such a description is less suited to "De rêve." Neither song clearly exemplifies this archetype.

Debussy uses different techniques to suggest the passage of time than he does to suggest an environment of disorientation. In "Le jet d'eau" and "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," he uses the technique of effacement. Motivic repetitions are partial or obscured, variations that emphasize transformation and the passage of time. In contrast, as we shall see in the next section ("Alternatives . . ."), Debussy uses divided variation techniques to invoke both disorientation and distortion.

The progression of agential relationships in "En sourdine" (1892) presents another type of teleological construction. Its interruption points to another means of temporal disorientation. In this setting, as each new characteristic motive is introduced, the role of the piano changes, moving from subtle heterophony to complementary accompaniment and finally to a parallel of the vocal part. As such, the piano appears to relinquish its independence, joining its identity with the voice. And yet this agential teleology is undermined in the final quatrain by a disorienting double-layered reference to the past at precisely the moment the poem addresses the future.

When Debussy manipulates his thematic material using rhythmic augmentation, it is often the poetic "present moment" that triggers this temporal dilation. For example, in "Les ingénus," the theme returns in the final stanza, but the rhythmic values are double those of the original presentation. This change mirrors the poetic change of tense (from past recollection to present day), transmuting the "stuck" harmonic energy of the original motive into a slower tempo. In "Le jet d'eau," slowing the rate of poetic text-setting also accompanies immediate address in the present moment. By contrast, in "L'ombre des arbres" and "De fleurs,"[504] proportional expansion is associated with the past. Thus, temporal augmentation allows Debussy

[504] This passage is from earlier in "De fleurs." Note that at the *end* of "De fleurs," the final presentation of the theme is treated to both rhythmic augmentation and phrase interpolation. Here, it is the reality of the speaker's *present state* is given extra time to sink in.

to contravene the established flow for rhetorical purposes, whether to distill it as the eternal present moment, or to evoke the contradictory pace of memory.

Alternatives: Modular, Stratified, and Conflated Temporalities

Debussy's compositional approaches also include modularity, stratification, and conflation. Such nonlinear techniques can tantalize expectations of return without predictable fulfillment and, because they cut across expected formal archetypes, they are imbricated with agency. In "Rondel: Pour ce que Plaisance est morte" and "L'ombre des arbres, the modular approach is associated with memory (recall and temporal inversion). In "Le jet d'eau," stratification of tonal syntax evokes a fractured, fragile pastoral; in "De fleurs," thematic stratification enacts the hemming in of a captive protagonist.

Going beyond a mere layering of thematic elements, in "En sourdine" (1892) and "Je tremble en voyant ton visage," Debussy suggests temporal conflation by simultaneously expressing stasis and progress or by folding together functional events that should be separated in narrative time. The result is a supercharged atmosphere in which interpretive confusion turns attention to the immediacy of experience and gives rhetorical emphasis to the protagonist's entreaty.

Suggestion and Uncertainty

I have said that the experience of the listener is a vital component of the theory of musical contingency. Because Debussy's rhetoric of suggestion denies or multiplies expectations for logical continuation, the contingent state impels a kind of "float"—a working hypothesis without the means to confirm, a contingent projection into the future. On the other hand, retroactive reevaluation also allows for the conditional, for the evaluation of what an event *would have* meant, *if* conditions or contexts had not changed.

Figure 7.1. Types of uncertainty, revisited

Not known	No ideas/inclinations/directions; infinite possibilities
Not certain	Hypotheses exist; ambiguity
Not present	Known, but not palpable; implicates the present
Not determined	Not fated; implicates the past
Not proven	Not proven; implicates the future

Debussy cultivates several types of uncertainty (see figure 7.1). Ambiguity is the most prevalent in these songs: two possibilities coexist, without one gaining a definitive upper hand. While Debussy employs ambiguity throughout his works, ambiguous endings are the strongest examples, since the work itself refuses to choose. As examples, the conclusions of "Spleen" and "Recueillement" each provoke ambiguity rather than clarity. Of course, instability is inherent to the experience of ambiguity, in the sense that a listener must toggle between two interpretations. In "Je tremble en voyant ton visage," Debussy actually thematizes instability as a thoroughgoing characteristic. Another kind of uncertainty arises when the listener "knows" the result but the presumed cause is, in fact, not palpable in the present. Debussy's stratifications, especially the instances of possible tonal causality (e.g., in "Le jet d'eau," where a dominant unresolved in the moment brings forth its tonic much later in the piece), are examples of this type. The contextual re-interpretations and transformations of thematic material in "De rêve" and "En sourdine" (and the flute theme of the *Prélude à "L'après-midi d'un faune"*[505]) demonstrate an uncertainty that rests on something not predetermined or fated to be.

Debussy's rhetoric is perhaps most compelling when he contradicts the implications of his materials, whether thematic, formal, harmonic, or topical. This creates a situation of uncertainty that rests on something unproven: in such cases Debussy actively undermines what we thought we knew. For example, in "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," the refrain—

[505] DeVoto, *Veil of Tonality*, 59–60.

typically a hallmark of stability or return—serves as a catalyst of change. The refrain should not destabilize the song's tonal center, but Debussy uses it in just that way. And yet, the song's ending is again ambiguous: triumphantly at rest in the new key, it nevertheless invites the listener to imagine yet another traversal of the changing tonal center, which has been the recurring arc of each stanza. In "Le jet d'eau" Debussy first uses thematic elements to delineate verse from refrain; but as the song continues, his manipulation of these themes eventually suggests porous boundaries and an integration of previously opposed formal and expressive functions. Contradiction of boundaries is also a feature of "Rondel: Le temps a laissié son manteau," where elements sustained across formal breaks support a new kind of directional logic.[506] As we have already seen, Debussy's settings give rise to moments of the musically surreal when he pits expected tonal function against thematic design or topicality. Another example of this tensional stance is Debussy's deceptive pastoral, which (as we have seen) operates by both evoking and contradicting the mode's expressive contract.

[506] In his analysis of "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," Parks identifies "Debussy's use of constants to form continuities that subtly mitigate the contrasts between formal units" (*Music of Claude Debussy*, 239), but he does not focus on the rhetorical, teleological, or tropological effects of such features.

Directions for Further Research

While the pieces studied here date from across Debussy's compositional career[507] and set texts from several different poets, a clearer picture of his strategies would of course be gained by making a detailed study of his complete works. Starting with poetic themes enabled my comparison of Debussy's compositional approaches to songs that share broad similarities in their texts—their lyrics or lyrical narratives. Similar poetic themes could be identified and studied in his other *mélodies*. And havingidentified musical strategies that recur throughout this repertoire (for example: nuanced subcategories of the pastoral, agential influence), it would also be fruitful and important to approach Debussy's works from these musical starting points, rather than from the perspective of the poetic themes.

Another angle to pursue would be to analyze how the rhetoric of suggestion manifests in Debussy's programmatic but non-texted repertoire. The *Estampes*, *Images,* and *Préludes* would be fertile ground for such an investigation, and one already begun in the analyses presented here, both in chapter 3 ("Le jet d'eau") and chapter 5 ("Recueillement"). Their solo-piano textures provide a natural link to strategies observed in the songs. Alternatively, these strategies and effects could be investigated comparatively in works of similar style, such as Ravel's song cycle *Histoires naturelles* or his piano suite *Miroirs*.

The Rhetoric of Suggestion

We have seen Debussy use the rhetoric of suggestion to influence a listener's experience of temporality. He constructs an experience of ecstasy via the sublime pastoral, and of the surreal through event conflation and ontological contradiction. He nuances mnemonic experience using various techniques: nostalgia—an awareness of the past in light of the present (via thematic

[507] As such, the study aims toward the broad perspective. As Jann Pasler writes, "What is needed in every domain is the long view [. . .]. How did Debussy think of genre over the long term, tonality, timbre, and time?" "Debussy the Man, His Music, and His Legacy: An Overview of Current Research," *Notes* 69, no. 2 (December 2012): 216.

layering), resonance or replay (via contextual transformation of thematic materials, thematic modularity), and—perhaps ironically—foreshadowing and expressive force (via quotation). Disorientation engendered by tensional contradictions can create an experience of immediacy (e.g., Debussy's settings of "En sourdine"), in which focus on the *now* eclipses both reflection on prior events and anticipation of future events. And we have seen that Debussy uses temporal expansion to interrupt the unmarked (and unconscious) flow in order to give attention to a different time, whether present or past (e.g., "Le jet d'eau" and "De fleurs").

Debussy stages a unique subjectivity. His settings connect and contend with their poetic texts. He deploys his musical materials in ways that both reveal and frustrate their potential. The tensional rhetoric typically eschews singular interpretation, the works vibrate with possibilities: "fou de naître pour personne / Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser."[508] And his aesthetic often approaches deeply urgent emotion with seemingly non-urgent reaction. Glossing texts tinged with despair, he repeatedly depicts idealized retreat into a fractured past that can offer no true shelter against an uncertain future. The surface calm of this aesthetic distance belies its transfixing frustration; the beautiful enigmas of his rhetoric tremble with this hidden crisis, unresolved and unresolvable.

[508] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Éventail de Mademoiselle Mallarmé." The fan-poem's central stanza (lines 9–12) reads: "Vertige ! voici que frissonne / L'espace comme un grand baiser / Qui, fou de naître pour personne, / Ne peut jaillir ni s'apaiser." (Vertigo! Here trembles / Space like a great kiss / That, wild with being born for no one, / Can neither gush forth nor subside.) Debussy set the complete poem as the last of his 1913 vocal triptych, *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*.

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